CALIBAN
W.L.
GEORGE

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CALIBAN

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Engines of Social Progress
France in the Twentieth Century
Labour and Housing at Port Sunlight
Woman and To-Morrow
The Intelligence of Woman
Eddies of the Day

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[1] Published in the U.S.A. and Canada under the title, "Until the Day Break."
[2] Published in the U.S.A. and Canada under the title, "The Little Beloved."

CALIBAN

BY

W. L. GEORGE

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
—SHAKESPEARE—"Julius Cæsar."

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TO JOSEPH CONRAD

DEAR MASTER,

Even though you have given me leave to dedicate this book to you, I should hesitate to do so if I did not feel that in such a case it is he who gives, not he who receives, that enjoys honour; seemliness suggests that I refrain from flattery; duty commands that I express my gratitude for the generosity with which you received my last novel, remained unbemused by the anger of the reactionaries and the artistic prejudice of the advanced. I will say only that you induced me to doubt myself a little less, and subscribe myself, dear Master.

Your sincere friend,

W. L. GEORGE

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PART I
GROPING

" I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive—what time, what circuit first,
I ask not . . . "
—ROBERT BROWNING—" Paracelsus "

CALIBAN

CHAPTER I

WINCHESTER HOUSE

A SHAFT of light fell through the class-room window on the round bald head of old Chips. It looked red as the sun in fog. Red as a guinea. Bulmer yawned over his Livy and stared at the beam, at the grains of dust dancing in it. He thought: "I wonder how many bits of dirt there are in that beam." It was an interesting speculation, and his mind, that was not at all stimulated by Latin prose, wandered towards the obscene baldness of old Chips. Then he reflected that Topsy, who did maths., science and commerce, was also bald as any egg, while Clamart, the French master, and old Barnes, who took prep., and messed about, had splendid heads of hair.

"Go on, Tarland," said Chips. "Take the torch from the fainting hand of your comrade. *Ubi, in recensendis captivis.* Proceed, O Tarland."

"There, while counting the prisoners . . ." stuttered Tarland. Then again: ". . . were recognized as Tusculans . . ."

"Now," thought Bulmer, "both the bald ones are dark, and both the hairy ones are fair. Do dark men go bald first?" He grew so absorbed in this problem, which ramified into the practical idea that he might interview a scientist about this, say the chemist in Canterbury Road, that he started when old Chips suddenly bellowed:

"Compelled! *Laturus* does not mean compelled.

Was ever such a creature known in the Zoo at Regent's Park? Tarland, the vulpine dam of Romulus and Remus suckled you not! But let us draw a decent veil. Come, Selby."

And Selby began to drone forth, construing in sudden bursts, obviously chancing it. Bulmer realized that it would be his turn next, and, expelling outer-worldly preoccupations, strove to forecast the sentence where Selby would be stopped and he would have to start. The auguries were favourable, for Selby was lucky that morning. He reached the end of his allotted exercise without mishap, being subject only to the remarks that if Livy had used the word "got" three times in six lines he would have been kicked down the steps of the Capitol.

"Now, Bulmer," said Chips amiably.

"*Captivis introductis in senatum*, the prisoners having been brought into the Senate . . ." began Bulmer, his bright blue eyes looking doubtfully from under his brows. Ah! that was all right. And . . . oh, Lord! *mandassentique* . . . did that mean that the Tusculans had been sent to Camillus, or that Camillus had been sent to the Tusculans? It struck him that either way ought to do, as the whole bally lot amounted to nothing at all. But it didn't do:

"Camillus sent! Sent?" roared Chips. "Widely does your arrow avoid the mark!" Pleased by the answering sniggers of the class, Chips went on more kindly: "But don't despair, Bulmer, try again. Try 'entrusted with,' instead of 'sent.' One day you'll be able to construe things like *sine qua non*, and master equally incredible difficulties."

". . . And had entrusted that war to Camillus . . ." said Bulmer despairingly. No remark from Chips, so obviously that would do. He went on: ". . . He asks one helper for himself for that duty. . . ." Still all went well. Then he struck a bit that he remembered by heart out of the crib, and Chips crossed his hands upon his gowned stomach with an air of content. Then Bulmer's memory failed: ". . . . *Romanis instantibus fines*, when the Romans entered their country, *non demigratum*, nobody emigrated," he muttered and tried to hurry on, but Chips leapt up in his arm-chair.

"Stop!" he bellowed. "Stop! ere you hurry us all into that section of Avernus where howls the shade of Propertius as it waits for that of Miss Braddon."

"Not everybody emigrated," said Bulmer hopefully.

"Nay, Bulmer, strive not. Horace foresaw you, and said your mountain might be in labour, yet of your efforts should an absurd mouse be born." Then, suddenly, the master lost his temper and addressed the class more colloquially:

"Gentlemen, you make me sick. I will say to you as did the officer who apologized, that you are fit to carry guts to a bear. You are my fourth form, but I am beginning to think that you are the fourth form because in this academy three forms know three times more Latin than ever you will." His choleric face shone, and he picked out Bulmer.

"Bulmer, in the words of the Elizabethan barbarian whom you call Shakespeare, I write you down an ass. You are fat and shining, with well-tended hide, as a hog from the herd of Epicurus. Hog and ass. Bulmer, you drive me to the end of my zoology."

A hot flush ran up Bulmer's cheeks, his ears felt fiery, and as sniggers rose about him he grew angry, and said:

"Oh, well, what's the good of Latin and Greek anyway?"

"What!" said Chips incredulously. "Say that again."

As Bulmer did not reply, Chips went on: "Did I understand you to ask, What's the good of the classics anyway?"

"Yes," muttered Bulmer shrinking.

"Oh? Plutarch must have been thinking of you when he said that the Macedonians are a rude and vulgar people who call a spade a spade. And, pray, what do you imply by that interesting remark?"

"Oh, well," said Bulmer desperately, "what's the good of Latin? Nobody talks Latin." As Chips stared at him, horrified, Bulmer, who felt very self-conscious, added: "If it was German it might be some use."

After a long pause Chips replied:

"This is not a debating society, Bulmer; but since I asked you what you meant you are entitled to speak. You mean that the classics have no utility?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, my child, I might bruise your adolescent head with the periods of Cicero, but I will have mercy upon you, I will refrain from you. I will tell you simply that utility is base and vile, and that nothing is any good to you if it is useful to you. And this being a metaphysical point, Bulmer, I do not expect you to grasp it. Rather will I teach you to love wisdom and clarity by asking you to write out for me, and deliver, mind you, punctually, by the morning of the day after tomorrow, five hundred times this solemn resolve: "I must not be a utilitarian." And now pass on, pass on the torch, and you, Sykehouse, take it up and dance me merrily."

"Anyhow," thought Bulmer, "that's over," and wondered whether it would be possible to fit a penholder with five nibs instead of the usual three. This idea was entrancing, for he was not quite fifteen. If one could only make a penholder with five hundred nibs, why, the great impot problem would be solved.

Winchester House was a bad school, but as schools went in those days, when Queen Victoria had still three years to wait to celebrate her first jubilee, it was not much worse than most bad schools. This academy for young gentlemen occupied in Maida Vale a large, double-fronted house, built under William IV. and since then seldom repaired. Partitions had been knocked down to make a big class-room on each side of the door. The paint was brown. The walls were papered dark red with a pattern of yellow roses. The boys sat upon forms that were too high for the little ones and too low for the big ones. In a corner stood a globe; upon the walls hung Mercator maps; in the big class-room was also a colossal gold-framed engraving of the wedding of Queen Victoria to the Prince Consort. Behind the wire-blinded windows lay the gravel front garden, where lingered evergreens, which Tarland called nevergreens. Lost among these shrubs stood a statue of a nude and peeling female pouring nothing from a jug.

It was not such a bad school. Mr. Walton, otherwise Chips, had been to Oxford, taken honours in classics, had married a local barmaid. After being turned out of several schools, because Mrs. Walton visited the bars

of the town, either for old sake's sake or for refreshment, he had imitated his wife. Now, fifty, too fat, very red, pompous, choleric, he drank, not enormously, but steadily. He shaved every two days, except when he expected parents. He breakfasted in his gown, and spilt egg on it. Tarland called it the robe of the Ethiopian, because like the leopard it never changed its spots. But Chips had a true and passionate feeling for the classics. He managed to bang and bellow some of his fervour into those sons of tradesmen and decayed gentlefolk from Kilburn and Brondesbury. He was a better man than old Topsy, with his long, melancholic head, his soup-scented moustache and whiskers, and his capacity for preventing the boys from ever finding out the difference between the binomial theorem and atomic weights. Old Topsy taught commerce too, a concession to the modern spirit of the eighties. He was qualified because he had once joined his brother-in-law in a tea business that failed. Then there was Clamart, the Frenchman, with hair that stuck up, and a moustache that stuck up, who taught French, and German, and music, and dancing, and set the boys undesirable translations out of the fashionable Mr. Zola. He was often seen picking up girls outside the "Chequers." There was old Barnes, too, grey, spectacled, and free from all illusions, presumably because he had to teach geography. He also took prep., that is, he sat down while the boys larked, and page by page he inspected his stamp collection. He was also supposed to supervise games because, thirty years before, when he belonged to the Brixton Hebdomadals, he had knocked up seventy-two off a bowler with a cast in his eye.

And yet, Winchester House might have been a worse school. If old Chips, casting treasure before them, and Topsy, automatically chalking up equations, and Clamart, liberating the boys from the pompous Corneille, and the wearisome Madame de Sévigné, were not educating, they were not miseducating. The boys learnt little, but they escaped being moulded into a common form. Thus, Tarland, who was mechanical, found that Topsy let him off chemistry and allowed him to concentrate on light, heat, and elementary electricity. And Selby, who was good at games and nearly sixteen, went about

with Clamart and learnt a bit about the world. Bulmer was less fortunate. He looked upon the whole curriculum as sodden rot. He hated Latin with excessive intensity; Topsy's chemistry was no good to him; what Bulmer wanted to know was how they made soap, and what was the real difference between iron and steel. He liked Clamart. When the master asked him why he was so keen on French, he replied: "I want to speak French, because one day I'll go to France." Bulmer was not lazy; indeed, if facts had been laid before him he would have memorized them endlessly. He came across "Hard Times" at home, one day, and developed admiration for Mr. Gradgrind. Now he was walking home for dinner, swearing aloud:

"Sodden rot! Got to write that out five hundred times! The same thing five hundred times! As if anybody cared about a thing after it had been said once."

CHAPTER II

A FAMILY

IT was after nine o'clock. On the right side of the hearth, in a worn horsehair arm-chair, sat Mr. Bulmer, his feet, encased in flowered slippers, upon the fender. He was reading the "St. James's Gazette." Opposite, but, because she was a woman, in a smaller and less comfortable arm-chair, sat Mrs. Bulmer, rather stately in her tight bodice of puce alpaca, with a long row of black buttons from neck to waist, and her pleated skirt of black merino, of which the bustle was thrust away a little towards the left. She looked content, rather rigid in her powerful stays that thrust up her bust and narrowed her waist. An established lady. Her toes, turning neither in nor out in her neat kid boots. From time to time she read a page of the second volume of "Ishmael," then just out. She loved Miss Braddon. Miss Braddon understood romance.

From time to time Mrs. Bulmer swept a look full of capable control over her family, then collected about the round table, and littering with the implements of their work the green plush cloth with the golden fringe. Eleanor was mending socks. She was very good-looking in a meagre way, with her high nose, her faintly golden skin, the wavy brown hair which tossed in rather matted heaps (for she seldom washed it) over a very fine forehead. Her fine-cut lips, the long, nervous hands and the stirring blue of the large, long eyes would have made her beautiful if Eleanor had not had the teeth of her period: she did not even have them all.

In the lamp the bad oil smoked, and through the frosted globe the light played on Henrietta's features, for the younger sister was nervous. As she bent over the underclothes which she was making out of lawn, all

the time her hands sought unnecessary scissors, or absent thread. She jerked her head. She looked about her, birdlike, inquisitive. She too had the golden skin inherited from her mother, and the bad teeth inherited from Victorian puritanism. Yet there glowed in her eyes, blue too, something soft, half-flirtatious, that was absent in those of Eleanor. When even she looked at Richard, who sat over "The Boys' Own Paper" volume for 1883, she gave a little half-friendly smile. As if even Dickie were a man.

Mr. Bulmer put down the "St. James's Gazette" and yawned. This indicated to the family that the master of the house was taking his ease, and that his women might talk. Eleanor said:

"I can't understand why you waste your time making those things, Hettie."

"To wear them," said Henrietta, rather sprightly. (A young man with whom she once waltzed three times in a night had told her that she was spirited.)

"I don't suppose you want to sell them," said Eleanor. "What I mean is, what do you want to wear things like that for? Calico is quite as good and much cheaper."

"I dislike calico," said Henrietta. "If I choose to spend my money on lawn, surely that is my business."

"Oh, surely. But I can't imagine what you want to wear lawn for. Nice women don't bother so much about their underclothes, if you ask me."

"I'm not asking you," snapped Hettie; "and," she added savagely, "if you ask *me*, I don't think this discussion is at all proper in the presence of gentlemen."

"Now, gals," said Mrs. Bulmer, closing up "Ishmael," "please don't quarrel. Hettie is quite right. This is not an occasion for discussing these things. They have nothing to do with your father."

"I don't see why she shouldn't buy things that wear," growled Eleanor, taking long stitches that would avenge her when the sock was worn. She said no more, and contented herself with sulky side glances at Henrietta, who was now giggling and blushing because her father, interested by the conversation, was winking his left eye at her with solemn regularity.

" You girls ! " said Richard, " always on the randan ! When I get married I shan't allow those goings-ons."

Henrietta tossed her head, then cried out :

" You little beast ! " for Richard had kicked her shin under the table. He got up, took some exercise books which lay on the sideboard under the salad dressing. After a moment, as he opened the books, he found there was not room, got up, and placed the " Boys' Own Paper " on the top of other books on the shelf. After a moment Eleanor, who had watched him, said :

" Richard ! "

' Yes ? "

' Do you see what you've done ? You've put your book on the Bible."

" Oh, get out ! "

" You mustn't answer your sister like that," said Mrs. Bulmer. " Eleanor is quite right. You should put nothing on the Bible, not even the lightest paper."

With a growl, Richard relieved the Bible, and, sitting down again, began to write.

Mrs. Bulmer, her eyes lost in vagueness, was thinking. Her evening frock was really rather faded ; what a pity broché went like that. She hadn't been able to resist it. Such a pretty shade of garnet ! and it went so well with her crimson flounced skirt. It struck her that something might be done. Perhaps turning might help. And she might freshen it up by putting in a new ruche round the back, and change the shoulder straps. What would go with garnet ? she wondered. Turquoise blue velvet ? Or perhaps not . . . black velvet ? Velvet anyhow, velvet looked rich.

Mr. Bulmer was reading from the " St. James's Gazette " :

" We'll have to make an end of this Government. Gladstone left Gordon to die, and now his packed majority has saved him from a vote of censure. Bribed, the whole lot of them. The country's going to the dogs. Still," he smiled, " I suppose it'll last my time."

Nobody said anything. Politics belonged to the master of the house. He knew. Mr. Bulmer was good-looking, fifty-four, very bald, but his baldness went well with his heavy brown moustache and beard, that stood out sharp as if moulded against his rosy skin.

He was rather stout, but, crossed upon his waistcoat, his podgy hands were pretty. As nobody challenged him, he hummed for a moment: "Tol lol derol, fol derol," and once more took up the paper.

Mrs. Bulmer said: "Dick, it's time to go to bed."

"All right, mother."

"I didn't tell you to say 'all right,' Dick, I told you to go to bed."

"I've got something to do.'

"Oh! I thought that at Winchester House they gave no home work."

"It isn't home work."

"What is it?"

"It's an impot. Do let me get on with it, mother."

"Do you mean you've been punished? What have you done?"

"Oh, nothing. I just told old Chips that Latin wasn't any use."

Everybody looked at the boy, Mrs. Bulmer shocked at his revolt, Mr. Bulmer half-shocked and half-sympathetic, Eleanor distinctly censorious, Henrietta grew meditative, as if she wondered what sort of man was old Chips.

Mrs. Bulmer spoke: he had done very wrong. He had been rude. He had been rebellious. He had set himself up.

"Oh, I do wish you'd let me get on with it," said Richard. "I must not be a utilitarian," he groaned as he wrote. "I must not be a utilitarian—oh, lor', father, why mustn't I be a utilitarian?"

"Don't say, 'Oh, lor',' it's vulgar."

"You shut your ugly mug," said Richard.

"If you say things like that," said Mrs. Bulmer, "your father will give you a whipping."

"And quite right too," said Eleanor.

"Ellie, you give me the sick."

Everybody lectured Richard. Mrs. Bulmer intervened, and promised to wake him up at six o'clock next morning. Anyhow, he mustn't miss his beauty sleep. The boy sulkily went to bed; a quarter of an hour later his sisters folded up their work and also went upstairs.

For a moment Mr. Bulmer walked up and down, his hands in his pockets, whistling. Mrs. Bulmer said:

" For goodness' sake, don't whistle like that, Herbert, you get on my nerves."

" Where are the boys of the old brigade ? " whistled Mr. Bulmer. " Things are looking up, Edie ; had a bit of luck to-day. A man I'd never seen came up to me in the street and gave me his card. No end of a big pot in Barclay's Bank, and dealt in five hundred Jimmies."

" How much did you make out of it ? " asked Mrs. Bulmer, who did not care what Jimmies were, but knew what she wanted to know.

" Twelve ten. A few more of those and it won't be Mr. and Mrs. Bulmer of Carlton Vale long. We'll be having our own house with a drive *and* a side entrance for tradesmen in less than no time. I know a little place in Highbury that'd suit us down to the ground. Or what about those new houses in their own grounds which they've just put up at Frognal, in Hampstead ? On the very edge of the town ; it's like being in the country. Ah, Edie, if only I have a little luck—who knows ! You'd like to have your carriage, wouldn't you ? And a box at the Opera ? . . . and what about a week at the ' Royal York ' at Brighton ? "

Mrs. Bulmer smiled at him. Poor Herbert ! always optimistic. She despised her husband because he was a failure, but she loved him, probably for the same reason. He needed looking after, and when he had a cold she liked to bring him arrowroot in bed.

" I'm sure I hope so," she said. " Were Newton Leslie pleased ? "

" Rather ! New client, you see. Oh, there's life in the old dog yet ! There's more in this half commission business than you think. Things are a bit unsettled of course, with all this industrial unrest, and these trade-union agitations ; still, it'll all settle down. Mark my words : as soon as we get rid of that fellow Gladstone the trade-unions'll fall down dead. Dead as a door nail."

" I'm sure I hope so," said Mrs. Bulmer again. " A little entertaining would do no harm. We owe several people a dinner. And we've got to get Eleanor and Hettie married. Hettie's all right . . . if only I could take her to those new dances at the Paddington

Assembly Rooms. They say very nice young men go there—young men with property, solicitors, and even barristers."

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Bulmer. "We'll manage it."

Mrs. Bulmer browsed on: "Ellie's more difficult. She seems to hate society. Sometimes I wonder whether it wouldn't be right to let her go out and work as she wants to. Though I don't think it's nice for a young lady to go out giving piano lessons."

"Quite agree with you," said Mr. Bulmer. "We'll marry them off; it'll be all right. And as for Dick, well, it's too late to send him to a public school, but he can go to the university. He'll win a scholarship or something, or perhaps your brother'll help."

Mrs. Bulmer smiled. Uncle Hesketh was not generous. His Christmas present to Richard had been a volume of "The Boys' Own Paper."

"Ah, well," she said vaguely, "we'll see. Now let's go to bed. What's the good of wasting the light?"

Half an hour later a figure, clad in a dressing-gown, tip-toed into the room, carefully closed the door, lit the lamp. Richard sat down before the exercise books and resumed the impot. He was getting on; he had finished two hundred and eighty lines during prep., while Barnes meditated over his stamp album. Another seventy lines had been managed in the evening. He worked on, and every time he finished a page of twenty-six lines he said "damn" and turned over. He finished his five hundredth line as St. Jude's near by struck twelve. Then he looked savagely at the work.

"Five hundred times!" he said. "Five hundred times the same thing! What's the good of it? Mustn't be a utilitarian!"

Suddenly losing his temper he seized the pen and wrote in large, blotchy print below the last line: "Why not?" After a moment the fury passed, and he said:

"Now I've done it. Damn!" Then he felt inclined to cry. But Richard was practical, and thought: Damage's done; least said soonest mended. Tearing out the page, he re-wrote the twenty-six lines. But, as he went to bed, he was still oppressed by his tormenting idea! Why not be a utilitarian? Indeed, why not?

CHAPTER III

DEFINITIONS

MANHOOD, that steals upon some men slowly as the sun rises, was to be thrust upon Richard Bulmer. But he was to be so little conscious of surrounding fellow-creatures that all the world would be a toy to him. Trouble was to touch his family, and he would take his share of it without knowing that he did more than use his own life. This because, though nearly sixteen, though in the last two years he had grown very fast and was a lanky youth with an intelligent air, he was distinguished neither by attainment nor stupidity.

The life at school had never mattered much to him, for Winchester House, though it advertised its playing-fields, arranged only ragged football matches, matching sides of eight when more could not be found, or balancing a big boy against two little ones. It was a place of such amiable anarchy that it had not become, as would have a public school, the deity of his boyhood. It did imitate the nobler models; chapel, namely, the mumbling of a collect by old Chips, was compulsory; and there were prefects, overgrown boys who smoked cigarettes and drank pots of beer at the "Chippenham." They overlooked breaches of discipline if a small boy would carry a letter to a girl, or give some trifle, such as a pork pie. Bulmer did not mind; this mean life seemed natural to him; he dreamed a world very like his school, and it may be that he was not wrong. Also he was no longer being bullied, for, of course, there was a good deal of bullying at Winchester House; no brutality, exactly, no kicking, or roasting, or tossing in blankets, but a base habit of minor persecution. Instead of twisting another boy's wrist, a Winchester House boy would put a stump of rotten cabbage into his enemy's coat pocket. Or slip string round his

ankles during prep., and ghoulishly wait for him to get up.

Bulmer had been thus bullied because he was smaller and lighter than boys of his own age. All that had ended now, thanks to Joe, who hung about outside the "Chequers." Joe, aged about fifty, once enormously powerful, had been one of the assistants of Mace, and his sparring partner when Mace was training to fight O'Baldwin. Pockets of flesh hung below his eyes, and he had a slobbery lip, but, with his close-cut hair and his crinkled ear, he still looked a pugilist. Bulmer had noticed him once, when passing the "Chequers," then talked to him. He had asked him whether there was a difference of kind between the women who went into the bar with men, and those who sat alone in the ladies' bar. Joe liked young Bulmer, and entertained him with stories of the fights of Wormald and Tom King, and especially of his great master, Mace. So it occurred to Bulmer to end irritations at Winchester House by making an example. For several weeks, this costing him a pint a time, Joe led him to a building plot in the future Messina Avenue, and instructed him. Bulmer took no joy in these contests, and, though Joe played light, he often left a mark on the boy. Bulmer soon learnt to counter so fast that his old antagonist had no time to parry, but, though his foot work was naturally good, he had no interest in the game: he persevered because, as he put it, he was out for business.

The opportunity soon came. Among his persecutors was a big boy called Godesby, nearly seventeen, who had by his stupidity stuck in Bulmer's form. He was learning nothing; he had been shot into Winchester House by parents in India, like refuse on a dustheap. They paid; Godesby stayed at school; nobody bothered about him. So, being idle, Godesby specialized in the persecution of Bulmer. He put treacle on his seat, and pinned on his back a board marked: "Kick me, I like it." Bulmer said nothing. But, one day, when he felt ready, and when Godesby had beaten a record by filling his inkpot with sugar, so that the ink refused to dry, Bulmer waited for him after prep. As soon as Barnes was out of the way, he went up to

Godesby and quietly remarking: "You're a dirty swine," hit him on the mouth. Immediately a delighted ring formed round them. Nobody was going home yet. Not they. And, indeed, they were to have sport, for Godesby, though a fool, was no coward. With a bellow he sprang at Bulmer, who eluded him and, as he passed, struck him on the ear, following this up with a kidney punch. There were roars of applause, and the ring closed up, for there were no Queensberry rules at Winchester House: everybody expected Bulmer to jump on the fallen boy, to pull his hair and scratch his face. But he let Godesby get up, and though the other could give him a stone and a half, and a couple of inches of reach, Bulmer had already established moral superiority. Once or twice Godesby broke through his guard by weight, and drove him reeling against the wall, but, in the main, he struck the air, for Bulmer dodged, and ducked, and ran round him, striking sometimes with both fists. At last, by luck, perhaps, Bulmer caught the giant full under the chin, and, as he staggered, struck him a little below the belt. Winchester House didn't mind that, and as the fallen Godesby tried vainly to rise, Bulmer for the first time knew the sensations of a hero.

There was a little trouble about it at home, for Godesby had broken a tooth for him, and Mrs. Bulmer not only disliked having her son hurt, but the stump had to be drawn at the cost of seven-and-six. Eleanor thought him disgusting, but Henrietta gazed rapturously at her brother: he was really a man. Mr. Bulmer told him vaguely that he didn't like this brawling, and gave him a shilling. Bulmer was fond of his father, who often had played with him as another child. But the boy had the seriousness of youth, and felt bruised and lonely because his father avoided his questions and would not give him the intellectual comradeship which makes love between father and son. Mr. Bulmer's optimism struck him as beyond allowance, for he realized that his father hadn't got on. He felt a dim pity for the old man, a pity that hurt him because he dared not express it, so he accepted his father's failure as a natural fact. His father hadn't got on; well, he supposed he must do better: also, that which ad

happened had happened, and was as wholly lost as the previous day.

For a moment, when he reached sixteen, it seemed that Bulmer might be drawn into his family's concerns. It happened on a Sunday. Bulmer grew conscious of trouble after church. After leaving St. Jude's, the family took the air in Queen's Park as usual, and nothing was said. Mr. Bulmer was particularly jaunty, swinging his stick and whistling, "We won't go home till morning." He always whistled when his wife had been telling him what she thought of him. Bulmer did not dwell on this. He was watching the couples, and making up his mind that it was all rot saying fair men liked dark girls, and vice versa. He saw lots of fair and fair, and dark and dark. Then the proportions changed, and the popular verdict was justified.

"Why do fair men like dark girls?" thought Bulmer. The question in his mind took on the intensity of a headline.

So he overlooked the disturbance. He supposed mother'd been making father sit up. But, after dinner, when the dining-room door was shut and Mr. Bulmer lay in his arm-chair asleep, the "Sunday Times" on his head to keep off the flies, Mrs. Bulmer sat alone in the drawing-room, which was always open on Sunday afternoons. Bulmer, who was crossing it to get on the veranda and climb down into the garden (where, among neglected beds of marigold, she was erecting water-works, fed from the kitchen tap), found his mother, her hands in her lap, weeping, and upon the floor a volume from Mudie's, badly trampled. He hesitated: his mother did not encourage affection, but her attitude stirred in him an emotion forgotten since babyhood. In that moment he ached for her, and did not know how to express his helpless sympathy. He went up to her, knelt by her side, put his arms round her, very shy, very red, feeling that he was shoving his oar in. He asked her several times what was the matter, but all Mrs. Bulmer would reply was:

"You wouldn't understand."

"Oh, yes, I would, mother. I'm not such a fool as I look."

"I don't think that, Dick, but, you see, you're not

grown up yet. You can't understand our troubles quite."

"Guv'nor been at it again?"

"I don't know what you mean!" said Mrs. Bulmer, severely, for this expression to her suggested drink.

"Yes you do. Making the shiners fly."

"I do wish you wouldn't use slang. Oh, I do wish your father wouldn't speculate."

"There you are, didn't I tell you? Course he's been making 'em fly. He's a regular old masterpiece."

"It is not for you to judge him," said Mrs. Bulmer. "After all he is your father. He did what he thought wise, and if things didn't turn out as he expected, it isn't for his son to set himself up as a judge over him."

"Oh, mother, that won't wash. You know quite well you're as down on him as I am. Why didn't you keep an eye on him?"

"What do you mean?" cried Mrs. Bulmer, suddenly impelled to confidence by having to defend herself. "Is it my fault that instead of getting orders from other people to buy shares, your father should have what he calls a flutter? You'll be saying it's my fault he sold electric lift shares. Is it my fault that he said electric lifts were all nonsense, and the company was bound to break? Is it my fault if electric lifts are a success, and your father has to buy back those shares now they've gone up? and lose eight hundred pounds?"

"Eight hundred pounds!" said Richard; "my, he *has* been going it!"

"It is nothing to do with you," said Mrs. Bulmer, recovering her conjugal loyalty. "Go into the garden at once, and, good gracious! you've got your feet on my flounce."

She pushed him away, rose from the sofa, caught up her fur-edged black velvet tippet, and, majestic, left the room.

Richard tried to resume the discussion, but Mrs. Bulmer refused to talk any more. For a few days his father went on whistling, and one evening, at supper, talked loudly of taking them all to the Alhambra, now that varieties had been resumed at that theatre. Then came the solicitor's clerk whom Richard had seen once

before ; he caught mysterious references to mortgages and insurance policies. His sisters knew nothing, or would say nothing. Eleanor told him to mind his own business ; Henrietta wept and said : " What do I know about it ? I'm only a girl."

Then he forgot all about it, for he was discovering London, and he found in her central portions a growing delight. Tarland helped him greatly in this, and often, after prep., they would wander down Edgware Road, staring at Bradlaugh's house, and on into Oxford Street. They laid bets on the next bus being a Road Car or a General. Then on to Oxford Circus and Regent Street, where, feeling very grand, they drank coffee at the Monico. They went further, too, down the Strand to look at the posters of the Tivoli, and into Fleet Street. The Fleet Street area created trouble sometimes between Bulmer and Tarland : they liked to go up Fetter Lane and stand outside the printing offices ; Tarland would talk of how a printing press was made, of how it worked, while Bulmer, without being able to explain why, took a half-sensual delight in listening to the clank. Or he peered through gratings, endlessly, to see copy after copy of a printed page slowly descend on the moving arm of the press.

" I wish I had one of those things," said Bulmer vaguely.

" I'd like to take it to pieces," said Tarland.

CHAPTER IV

"THE WYKEHAMIST"

BULMER'S thoughts were diverted from the financial mysteries of his family by an organism which created itself rather than was created, and almost at once captured all that in him sought to express itself. It came about when he was sixteen and a half, and when his departure for the university was still in a state of suspended hopefulness. There were many such boys at Winchester House. Almost everybody was bound for Oxford or Cambridge, just as everybody was bound for heaven; but nobody went. Now and then a boy of sixteen was abducted by his parents, as a hen in the night by a fox. The old boy would come back six months later, a junior clerk in the City, talking proudly of the importance of his firm, and in general of Life. But few parents thought it genteel to withdraw their sons so early, and so the boys stayed up to seventeen or so, while old Chips,who was too slack to work up new lectures, amused them with dips into the curriculum.

Thus, the big boys had very little to do. They turned into half-men. Being free from prep., they practised introduction to life by means of the inevitable pots of beer, Trichinopoli cheroots, and, from seven o'clock onwards, love, as expounded by the girls at the pastry cooks' and drapers' in Kilburn High Road.

They played games with heavy condescension, and it was on a Saturday afternoon, in the disgusted interval when the one cricket ball had been lost, that "The Wykehamist" arose swift as an industrial mushroom. The ball had been lost because the boy in the slips had missed a catch, and, losing his temper, had picked up the ball and hurled it at the batsman's head. As the pitch was laid out in a little building-plot near

Arkwright, Road it went through the palings, where some small boys (described at Winchester House as " those Brondesbury cads ") seized it and kicked it down the hill, yelling. Meanwhile Winchester House was massed at the far side of the palings, bellowing words they had learnt in Kilburn High Road, and vowing that they would disperse the liver of the Brondesbury cads when they caught them.

While two or three chased the Brondesbury cads, Sykehouse said to Bulmer, languidly : " I call it jolly bad form."

" Who, what ? " asked Bulmer.

" Stealing our ball. But what can you expect of a place like this ? "

" What's wrong with the place ? " asked Bulmer.

" Well, we call them the Brondesbury cads, but what are we after all ? We're only a day school. We've got no traditions."

Bulmer looked at him meditatively. Sykehouse was a tall, lanky, fair boy, a few months older than Bulmer. He was always deliberate, and talked as if he cared for nothing. This, added to the fact that his father was a retired naval commander who struggled to live on a tiny pension and bred guinea-pigs, gave him some authority in the school. Yet the word " tradition " woke in Bulmer instinctive antagonism. He didn't like it, and he didn't know why.

" What's the good of tradition ? " he asked.

" Keeps fellows together," yawned Sykehouse. " Keeps 'em decent."

Bulmer became thoughtful.

" I don't know that I'm as struck with tradition as you are, but if other schools have got traditions—well, perhaps you're right, why shouldn't we have one ? "

Sykehouse smiled and replied in a shocked tone :

" My dear chap, you can't buy a tradition at the Stores. We haven't got a tradition. It's a pity, but it can't be helped."

Then Bulmer grew vivid :

" Why not ? Let's make a tradition. Traditions have got to be made, like everything else."

Sykehouse protested against this revolutionary idea. He grew faintly excited. The messengers not having

returned with the lost ball, Tarland joined the group, and then Upton, who, as usual, contributed nothing but ribaldry. He had a round face and eyes like currants, so he couldn't help it.

"Look here," said Bulmer, taking charge of the meeting, "Sykehouse says we're a lot of cads. Now don't sing out, all of you. He's right. We aren't the stuff out of which they make Piccadilly Johnnies with glass eyes. He says we want a tradition! I'm on. I say we've got to make one. You chaps coming in?"

"Rather," said Tarland.

Upton nodded. Then Mardy, who had sidled up to them, joined, and Selby gave the tradition club the sacrament of his approval as captain of the eleven.

When the meeting quietened to expectation, Bulmer said:

"Well, that's all right. It is hereby moved and seconded that the Winchester House tradition is and shall be . . . well, is and shall be whatever it is. Only what's it going to be?"

"We might go in for proper games," said Selby, "if we had some decent playing-fields."

"We might get hold of a better place," remarked Tarland. "Not a bad idea. If we were to play up a bit we might get some big matches like Eton and Harrow at Lord's."

"Yes, I'm for games," said Upton.

"No," said Bulmer, "that wouldn't do. It'd take ten years, or ten thousand, to pull up this school. Besides, I don't want to wait even six months. We want our tradition now."

"What this school wants," said Sykehouse, "is a touch of style. The school cap's all right, but all the other schools round here have got caps. There's a club at Eton called 'Pop' that goes in for special clothes."

"Good," said Upton. "I say yellow breeches with broad arrows."

"You shut up. I suppose we could all raise a topper, and tails. What about doing something like leaving the bottom button of one's waistcoat undone? Something new."

"What about putting your trousers on inside out?" suggested Upton.

"Something distinctive," said Sykehouse, ignoring the joker.

"No good," said Bulmer; "you can wear a topper if you like, but I don't want to sweat like a bullock."

There was a long silence while everybody thought, when Bulmer violently dug Tarland in the ribs and cried:

"I got it. What about a school magazine? That's the ticket! Keeps you in touch with the old boys. Quotations about Winchester House from the 'Morning Post' of 1780; Winchester House roll of honour in the Crimea; letters from an old boy who's a bishop."

His enthusiasm was such that everybody surrendered, and the magazine was born. There was a long argument over the name. Sykehouse wanted to call it "The Kilburnian." "The School News" was rejected because it might apply to any damn school. At last, after three days, Bulmer discovered that Winchester boys called themselves Wykehamists, and, to the horror of Sykehouse, "The Wykehamist" was enthusiastically adopted.

"Pretending to be at Winchester! I call it jolly bad form."

"Oh, go to hell with your old form!" said Bulmer; "we don't want any good form, we want this magazine to go." (He had forgotten the tradition and never thought of it again.)

"The Wykehamist" had a short but interesting career. It began ambitiously, with subscriptions ranging between sixpence and five shillings, from various parents, mainly the parents of the boys who had been asked to contribute. Bulmer, who had heard of the typewriter, then almost as curious as twenty years later the aeroplane, thought of having the necessary fifty copies typed every month by Remington. But the cost of production was too high, while printing proved worse. Finally "The Wykehamist" was reproduced on that precursor of the collotype, a sticky sheet of gelatine, from which the necessary copies were smudgily drawn with ink that ran from handwriting that had convulsions.

"Another twenty on to our circulation and nobody will be able to read anything. Our success will bust us."

"The Wykehamist" certainly deserved to "bust" with success. An inspired mind guided it, even though it had to put up with painful impediments. The committee had thought it advisable to get in old Chips. As Bulmer put it: "If we don't let him in, he'll try to stop it. If we do let him in we can say enough to make him stop it ten times, but he won't do it." Unfortunately old Chips, who was expected to contribute some rot about Horace, determined to be local, and produced an article on the fauna and flora of Kilburn. As this was not very varied, and as old Chips knew the Latin for most plants but not the English, and talked vaguely about the oaks and daisies in Queen's Park, Bulmer put in some bits of his own. When old Chips protested against being made to say that between the begonias in Hamilton Terrace he had noticed love-lies-bleeding and rosemary, Bulmer told him that if one only put things in that were true in the magazine there would be nothing to write about. Anyhow it would make people wonder.

The first was not a bad issue. There were football forecasts by Selby, who in the second issue printed a statement showing in how many cases he'd been right and said nothing of those in which he had been wrong. Tarland contributed some personalia, including some verse, where he made the name of the French master rhyme "you a clam are." When Mr. Clamart, after great difficulty, found out what a clam was, the magazine would have been stopped if old Chips had not said that clam fitted him to a T. Upton supplied correspondence asking for information as to shops where one could buy cheaply stamps, toffee and cricket bats. (He supplied the answers himself in the second issue.) As for Bulmer, he was editor, cutting, saving lines, paragraphing, and experimenting with headlines. He had never been so happy before. It was a success, and Mr. Barnes said to him after prep.:

"Bulmer, I should say 'The Times' contains more news, but what you're doing is more readable."

And so "The Wykehamist" went on, impertinent, incoherent, and neatly following the talk of the day. Thus, in the second issue, when Sarah Bernhardt was booming, Mardy contributed several stories of the great

actress, which he had stolen from the parish magazine. The features were maintained, and " The Wykehamist " extended its answers to correspondents, composed by the staff. These, being very stimulating, were an immense success :

" *A. F.*—You should have her chloroformed. Much less likely to cause trouble than shooting."

" *Rosy Toes.*—If he did that he is no gentleman."

" *Puzzled.*—Oh, you go and hang yourself ! "

That was their best number, for Clamart contributed reminiscences of the Franco-German war, but Sykehouse insisted on inserting his article on " Good Form," which had been crowded out of the first issue.

Unfortunately " The Wykehamist " was cramped, for it had only eight pages, and, by degrees, half the boys, many of their sisters, then some of the sisters' young men, poured copy upon Bulmer. He was quite calm. What he didn't want he tore up and used as scrap. As he put it : " We want more poetry. They use such lovely note-paper." The third issue caused a crisis, for Tarland brought up his personalia, and, after reading these through, Bulmer said :

" This is flat as ditch water."

" What's the matter with it ? " asked Tarland.

" Oh, I don't know. You've run out of ideas. You're stale."

Tarland gazed at him, incredulous. Bulmer added :

" We shall have to drop you out. It can't be helped."

Tarland began by threatening, then pleaded that he had been one of the founders of the magazine.

Bulmer reflected that indeed it was very hard on Tarland, that he liked him very much. But what could he do ?

" You see, old chap," he replied, " I can't help it. I've got to get the best stuff I can for the mag. If you've got no more ideas I must get in somebody else."

Bulmer felt sorry for a while, but he had to put in Mardy. He scored with an article from Topsy on " Scientific Experiments for Five Shillings a Year," though Topsy left the magazine after Bulmer altered his title to " Bangs and Stinks for a Brown a Week."

Then Barnes quarrelled with him because he refused " Thoughts on the Serious Call." " The Wykehamist "

lived seven months and, having attained a circulation of seventy-three, disappeared, partly because the editor's family at last met its catastrophe, partly because the editor, infuriated by seeing his circulation rise only three in two months, declared the thing was not paying its way and must be scrapped.

CHAPTER V

PRELUDE

IT was just after Bulmer's seventeenth birthday that he grew aware of some major disturbance in the affairs of his family, of something that happened in the evening after he went to bed, something confabulatory and controversial that carried raised voices to his bedroom. Eleanor knew something about It, but shut him up, telling him it was no business of little boys. As for Henrietta, she was turning an old costume. She certainly knew nothing. Indeed, she shared with him some lachrymose complaints.

" I'm twenty-six," she said, " and they don't tell me anything."

It, whatever " It " was, went up and down as things did at Carlton Vale. One night there was an audible quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Bulmer, from which Richard gathered that " she'd been a good wife to him," and later " . . . driving my children into the workhouse." Two days later Mr. Bulmer came home whistling and singing:

> " There's music in the parlour,
> To give the house a tone.
> There's something every evening,
> In Maggie Murphy's home."

And on Saturday afternoon they all took the steamer from Chelsea Pier to Greenwich and had a shrimp tea. Then It began again, and when his mother picked up " The Daily Telegraph," and kicked " The Financial Times " down nine front-door stone steps, he guessed It must be money. He was interested in " The Financial Times," which Mr. Bulmer now took instead of " The Financial News," because it had just been created and he liked being up-to-date. Sometimes Bulmer came down in his dressing-gown, well before breakfast, and

read it, sitting hunched up against the umbrella stand. It was mainly jargon, but attractive. It wasn't so much the idea of making money, but this talk of tea plantations in Ceylon, of railways in South America, of companies, of amalgamating capital, was exciting. A window upon the world. By degrees he came to understand the mechanism of limited liability, followed the rise and fall of favourite shares, much as some of his schoolmates followed the progress of Kent or of the Blackburn Rovers. Reconstruction of companies and the writing-off of capital were most exciting.

This education produced its fruits about the middle of the disturbed period. For " The Wykehamist " had, in its way, been a success. Expiring after the seventh number, and having achieved a total sale of about four hundred and sixty, at a cost of production of less than a halfpenny a number, Bulmer had made over six pounds, for, of course, the contributors were not paid. He kept this secret, partly because it might cost him his pocket-money, and mainly because he knew the money would be forced into a bank to do him good when he was grown up and didn't want it. Moreover, he wanted to buy an encyclopædia, having found out in odd volumes of this work, which Mr. Clamart used to raise the piano stool, that there was enormous interest in reading, first about Confucius, and then about conger eels. He often searched the Charing Cross Road, accompanied by Tarland, who was a nuisance however, as he persistently dug out old numbers of " The Amateur Mechanic." Just as Bulmer was engaging in complicated negotiations destined to knock down an almost complete set from six pounds fifteen, he came across the advertisement of an outside broker. He called personally for a prospectus, and discovered that, with five pounds deposited as margin, he could buy or sell fifty shares or a hundred pounds' worth of debentures, handle hundreds of pounds with tens. This produced in him a disturbance almost volcanic, not that he desired money, beyond fifteen shillings for the encyclopædia, but this idea of handling large sums, of being, in a way, a power in the market, was irresistible. He did not take his first step hurriedly. Three times he nearly bought " Berthas," then fortunately drew back. At last he realized that

markets cannot always go up, nor always go down: that if a share moved at all there must be a turning point. The thing to do was to find the turning point and turn with it. Thus, he came to sell Yang-tse-Kiang Concessions, which for weeks had been running up and up, starting at two shillings, leaping to six, tottering for a moment round seven, and then gaining threepence to ninepence a day, until they stood at eighteen shillings. They had paid no dividend; nobody knew why they rose, and for several days Bulmer watched them. Seventeen and nine, eighteen shillings, eighteen and three . . . seventeen and nine again, eighteen and six . . . eighteen and a penny halfpenny. . . . Instinct told him that a few people were still buying, but that other people were selling out. That was why the price varied so little. Soon, something must happen, because those who hadn't sold out would get frightened when the rise stopped. Then all would want to sell out. Now was the time.

So he called again on the outside brokers in Copthall Avenue. The head clerk, a German, did not suspect the young man of being a minor, for Bulmer, though short, was very self-possessed. But what he could not believe was that the young man wanted to sell fifty Yangs.

"Sell?" he said; "you mean buy."

"No, I want to sell."

"You want to sell a bear?" said the man, staring. (Bucket shops are not accustomed to greenhorns who sell bears; catching flats on the bull tack is nearer their mark.)

"Yes," said Bulmer, "they're going down," and paid his five-pound note.

He was right. Nothing sensational happened to Yangs. After four days the sellers forced down the price to fourteen shillings, after which the shares recovered and tottered round the fifteen figure. Bulmer did not succeed in buying back his shares at lowest, but, still, after paying brokerage and stamps, he cleared over seven pounds. Unfortunately he could not keep this to himself: success is the enemy of secrecy. It was not quite his fault: after supper, when It showed signs

of beginning, Mrs. Bulmer sat like a juggler who has swallowed his sword up to the hilt, and Mr. Bulmer remarked :

" Damn those Yangs ! "

" Herbert," said Mrs. Bulmer, " not before the children."

But Mr. Bulmer was exasperated. " Oh, I'm sick of all this hiding, Edie. They'd better know since we're all going to the workhouse."

" Please control yourself, Herbert. Is it not enough that my children's father should be a gambler, without their having to know it ? " She grew very red. " And instead of going down on your bended knees because you still have a roof over your head, you sit there—swearing ! Of course Yangs went down ; I told you so."

" Damn ! " bellowed Mr. Bulmer, " if you tell me you told me so again I'll—I'll emigrate."

" Oh, the bailiffs'll find you in New Zealand," said Mrs. Bulmer acidly.

It went on, though Mrs. Bulmer tried to change the subject. Then Richard said something idiotic :

" I knew Yangs'd go down."

" Oh, did you ! " said Mr. Bulmer ferociously. " I suppose you'll tell me you told me so next. And what do you know about it ? "

" Oh, nothing. Only I sold a bear."

Everybody stared at him. Then Mrs. Bulmer, in a thin, pale-yellow voice, whispered : " Richard, you haven't been gambling ? "

" I don't know about gambling, but I made seven pounds."

Mr. Bulmer stared at him, then, without logic, said : " You sold while I bought ? You've been working against your father."

" Well, you didn't tell me," said Richard, feeling guilty all the same.

Then It began properly. One father, one mother and two sisters demonstrated to Richard that he was an unnatural child, that he must have got into low company, with those vulgar young men in the billiard saloon. It was asserted that he would probably end in the workhouse, also in jail, also walk the Embankment without soles to his boots. Finally he was docked of

pocket-money for a month. As Richard went to bed he reflected: "Fined half-a-crown a week for a month. Ten shillings down. Won seven pounds. Net profit six pounds ten. It pays, but it's damn noisy."

But events hurried on. Mr. Bulmer had fluttered in a great many Yangs. A few days later the company's title was questioned, the shares crashed a shilling at a time, and, before the end of the account, no jobber would take them on his books. It began again, with the addition of Uncle Hesketh, a brewer, who, having retired just before brewery shares began to slump, knew everything. Something more was done to the insurance policy. It was very unpleasant, for, two days later, there was a man in possession, and everybody looked as if they'd committed a crime and, what was worse, expected to be found out. Except Henrietta: she said she was sorry for the man, such a nasty trade, and made him cocoa.

All this revealed to Bulmer why the talk of his university career had gone down and down. The idea of gaining an exhibition had long gone. Only one boy from Winchester House had ever won anything, and that one only stayed three months, after which his parents, who had come into a fortune, sent him somewhere else. Richard did not know what was going to happen to him. He asked once or twice, but his father either told him that everything would be all right by Thursday, or that he was improvident and no good to anyone, and was considering whether cutting his throat or hanging himself was preferable. Eleanor was out all day, doing something which she kept secret, while Mrs. Bulmer merely grew stiff and told her son that everything would be done for him that was right and proper. As for Henrietta, she was sympathetic, but talked like an imbecile about blacking their faces and playing the banjo in a music-hall.

"I suppose," he thought as he watched the cricket in the Paddington Recreation Ground, "that I shall have to do what I want. They don't want to do anything. They think if you do things you're not genteel. Suppose I could be a clerk." He was depressed, but dreamed of smart London night life, of which echoes came to him from old society novels: playing whist for high

stakes, champagne wine, ladies in tights and crimson sequins, young bloods fighting cabmen for a quid, and pugilists getting tight with noblemen. Then vigour returned to him: he was still too young to remain pessimistic or optimistic. He merely thought: "I'll be rich. By God, I'll be rich!" Then he remembered Uncle Hesketh who had asked him how much was four and a half per cent. on £125 for a year, and hurried on lest he should guess right, and talked about a boy knowing his place in life. "I'll be free. By God, I'll be free!"

A girl passed. She was quite young, and wore a fawn cloth bolero with black braid trimmings, and a great frilled skirt with many blue bows. He looked after her.

"Tidy bit of goods," he said, half aloud. She must have heard him, for she turned and flung him a sideways, soft brown glance. She looked at him with great severity, as if she were shocked. Recognizing this as the way of his period when consenting to approach, he followed her.

Her name was Annie. Her room was on the fourth floor of a house in Walterton Road. Many dirty children played on the steps, and from the cornice the stucco was peeling. It was not his first visit to that district, for one saw life early at Winchester House. He did not care for women much; they were an amusement of sorts, like the theatre, or the harriers. As he took Annie upon his knee and the soft eyes took on an air of reproof, he felt cheerful and confident.

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CHAPTER VI

GROWING UP

RICHARD was not unhappy in the City. He was a clerk at thirty shillings a week in the office of Blakeney, Sons & Co., Indian import merchants, in Leadenhall Street. Though he never said so, he had never wanted to go to Oxford, for they only taught you a lot of rot like Latin and Greek. A certain lack of sensuality made the rumours of wines and binges unappealing: nor, though he was a fair bat, and a rather foxy though light half-back, did he desire to earn a blue. Sometimes, as he made for Leadenhall Street on a City Atlas, that, highly-painted, very dashing, drove at a rattling speed and without stopping down Baker Street and Oxford Street, and on, with a coachman of the past, who wore a curly-brimmed silk hat, he thought he had been damn lucky to escape the mould of Oxford and the mildew of its learning.

For the City was reality. He did not mind keeping the stamp book, nor taking wet copies in the press, nor, later, posting a ledger. Every Saturday he liked the feel of his thirty shillings. He liked cigarettes (though still rather fond of coco-nut bar). He liked to pay for a seat at the Euston or the Holloway, to which he often went with Tarland and occasionally with Annie. And later with those who replaced Annie. He felt half-free, and had a sense of luxury when, at a cheap tavern in Leadenhall Street, he paid for their excellent cut off the joint, price sixpence; or sometimes he went to the Ten Ounce Chop, in Aldgate, where he solemnly read a broken-backed "Whitaker" behind the sizzling sausages and the steaming massed greens. He enjoyed money, for he liked things. The profits of "The Wykehamist," and later those of the flutter in Yangs, had not only bought him the encyclopædia, but various "Whitakers," odd volumes of the "Statesman's Year Book," dictionaries, and exciting collections of facts, such as

" Races of the World," " The Hundred Best Books," " The Railway Annual." From time to time he faced temptation, such as the summer during which he ached for one of the new bicycles with Dunlop tyres. But facts won.

All this distracted him from what was going on at Carlton Vale, though nothing need have impressed him very much, because in the class of half-poor, painfully genteel, restricted people to which he belonged, everything happened, but never on the surface. When the man in possession was in the house, Mrs. Bulmer had given a little tea-party, and the man in possession had been persuaded to play in the front garden with a rake. As Mrs. Bulmer put it, it all passed off very nicely, and indeed Mrs. Sandford took him for the gardener. So nice! That was how things happened in Carlton Vale. Then Eleanor declared that practising alone every day was so dull and didn't help to keep up her music. Of course, she could take lessons, but she didn't think she could find a suitable teacher in London, and she couldn't very well go to Dresden because her mother needed her. Still she had to do something, and it struck her that giving a few lessons, just to two or three select pupils, would keep her hand in. So Eleanor kept her hand in, charging one and six an hour, and as she was firm and conscientious did rather well, for soon she was out every morning and afternoon. Henrietta, as the Bulmer fortunes suffered more and more, followed as subtle a line. Mrs. Bulmer said she had no patience with girls who were always gadding and gallivanting outside the Oxford Street drapers' shops, or mooning about inside the house. So the servant was replaced by a little girl, and Henrietta made the beds ; then the little girl was replaced by a little morning girl, and Mrs. Bulmer cooked the meals while Henrietta swept, and cleaned the brass, but *not* the grates. She grew so capable that the little morning girl was replaced by an occasional charwoman, for somebody had to whiten the front door steps : there were things the Bulmers could not do.

Mr. Bulmer did not seem to notice much of this. The change which had begun to come over him four or five years before grew more accentuated ; his pink

complexion became pinker; he understood less clearly, but what he understood he retained more obstinately; he had never liked exercise, and now he reduced his Sunday afternoon walk, formerly Carlton Vale to Marble Arch and back, to the shorter run of Carlton Vale to the Canal. Sometimes he surreptitiously took an omnibus and hid himself for a quarter of an hour in Hamilton Terrace Churchyard, so that Mrs. Bulmer might not know that he had dodged part of his walk. His arteries were hardening; he was growing slower; as the earnings of his household increased his went down. His few clients who, for a long time, had given orders to "slow old Bulmer" because they liked him, began to give them to "poor old Bulmer" because they were sorry for him. And they gave less work to the man they were sorry for than to the man they had liked. He did not mind. He had never in his life read anything but the newspapers or a novel. Now he wanted a simpler kind of novel, something that demanded no thought; having come across some Henty presented to Richard by Uncle Hesketh, he enjoyed it very much; he went on to Ballantyne, to Captain Marryat; at last he began to browse in the bound volumes of "The Boys' Own Paper"; and when one day Richard, who now mixed contempt for his father with some love and much pity, offered him a very damaged "Chatterbox" on which Henrietta, twenty years before, had upset a plate of mutton broth, Mr. Bulmer read it and smiled without any sense of irony.

Then Mrs. Bulmer, who had only sixty pounds a year, fortunately tied up, found that the pound a week or so that Eleanor brought in, and the fifteen shillings a week which Richard gave, did not meet the deficit in Mr. Bulmer's income. It took her three months to resolve upon a lodger. She had awful fears of apartment cards in the window and what people would say. But she was lucky, for a relation in Germany of a nice lady whose acquaintance she had made while they were both waiting to interview charwomen in the High Street registry, was looking for an English family, preferably musical and rich in young society, for her nephew who was coming to England as a volunteer in a City firm. Hence, Mr. Karl Verden. The young man was in-

offensive. He was very pink, very short, had gentle blue eyes behind spectacles, and his yellow hair stood up like the crest of a cockatoo. In the evening he played Chopin tenderly, and, by degrees, Henrietta joined him in duets ; by growing degrees their hands lingered over the duets, and Chopin grew more and more sentimental. Mr. Verden was not in the way. He went out early and came home late. When spoken to he bowed, until Eleanor cured him. And, being full of equal gentility, he never soiled Mrs. Bulmer's hands with money, but left the weekly twenty-five shillings in a sealed envelope addressed to her, and half-hidden under the plate card dish. Mr. Verden could be explained away. The friend's friend in Germany became a friend of Mrs. Bulmer's in Germany ; Mr. Verden the nephew, became the son, then a little German baby whom she had dandled in the long ago, and who now, having come to London, wanted a mother. " What could I do ? Could I refuse ? " asked Mrs. Bulmer pathetically at tea. People thought she had a kind heart.

As the year passed, the situation defined itself. Henrietta was nearly twenty-seven. Of course, she had nice hair and a good skin . . . " Pity she is so sallow," thought Mrs. Bulmer, who, of course, only admired white and rose. There was no hurry for her to get married. But still. Of course Mr. Verden was only twenty-one. Still, she'd known lots of cases . . .

It really looked as if it might come off, for Mr. Verden wrote beautiful German verses in Henrietta's album, all about love that is like a little flower, and the golden cloud that hangs on the mountain's brow. Henrietta was very fond of her album. It was bound in red plush, and the word " Album," in nickel, was boldly stamped upon the flat. Sometimes, in her bedroom, she would read the beautiful things written by school friends in days gone by. She thought of Kathleen, who had written :

" Give every answer pat,
Your character true unfurl,
And when time is ripe
You will then be the type
Of a capital Irish girl."

Dear girl ! Pity her hair was carroty. There was Annabel, too. Her contribution was very edifying :

" Ill that He blesses is our good ;
And unblest good is ill ;
And all is right that seems most wrong
If it be His sweet will."

Poor Annabel ! In those days she wanted to be a nun, but now she was a Pity. Henrietta did not care to think of the latest report of Annabel. Rather would she dwell upon the womanly advice of her drawing mistress :

" Whatever you are, be that ;
Whatever you say, be true.
Straightforwardly act, be honest.
In fact, be nobody else but you."

" Ah ! " sighed Henrietta, " if only one could ! " Then she went downstairs because her mother was calling her to help find her little bag. Mrs. Bulmer frequently lost her little bag, and still more often the cellar key.

Richard found himself more and more removed from the microcosm of home. He was thinking of life while they were thinking of living. He found the future most confusing, for he was quite sure that he was not going to stay in the City at thirty shillings a week, but he did not know how to get out. He went seriously into this with Tarland, one evening, as they strolled up to Hampstead. Tarland, who was working for the South Kensington Science and Arts degree, was little interested, because he would clearly be an engineer, and, in due course, dam the Nile, or bridge Niagara, or something. But between the two existed the friendship of boys ; that is to say, each in turn talked exclusively of himself and his future, and the other interrupted when he got a chance. Bulmer was the more successful of the two. On this occasion he said :

" I've been looking up histories of all sorts of people. Now the point is : how do they get on ? Take Napoleon, for instance. I can follow him all right as an officer in the artillery. Then : pop ! he's a general. Or take Manning. He's all right until he gets to be archdeacon and goes over to Rome. But there's nothing to tell you how he jumps from a sort of priest to archbishop. There's gaps in their beastly careers. Now, if one only knew how one gets on step by step, one might be able

to do it. Take the Menai Bridge—Britannia Bridge, I mean ; Robert Stephenson didn't build anything like it before : what did he do to make them pitch on him ? "

They passed some evenings analysing the processes of talent. They were too young to understand the imaginative leap which must be made by the people who give genius its chance. Being materialists, they granted nothing to luck ; both practical, they could not believe that a man got his opportunity as he might get measles. They did not see the world as an ill-disciplined dog kennel ; they had enough illusion to imagine the progress of individuals as that of a soldier who is first private, then corporal, then sergeant, and so on. Hence their difficulty. Tarland was fairly comfortable : he believed in Edison, Moissan and Faraday, but Bulmer wanted a non-scientific god. For some time he tried to worship Cavour, Talleyrand, and Machiavelli, but as at bottom he despised cunning, he divided his allegiance between Napoleon and Bismarck. This because they went in for lots of things, not only fighting, but making laws, setting up theatres, bagging the tobacco crop. He liked them because they did things, rather than because they did anything in particular. He wanted money as power rather than as money, and spat contempt after having wasted twopence on a copy of " Fortunate Men And How They Made Their Fortunes." Wasted twopence on Samuel Smiles and his pi-jaw !

It was in this incoherence that he grew up. When he was twenty, his father died. He died quietly, without dignity, without producing an effect either of comedy or tragedy. He had been a long time over it. They buried him, received what was left of the two thousand pounds insurance policy, after paying off eleven hundred in mortgages. Mrs. Bulmer bought great quantities of crape ; Henrietta stopped crying when Eleanor told her that her nose was getting as red as a tomato ; Richard collected the Henties and the Ballantynes and swapped the lot for two volumes of the Century Dictionary. He had other things to think of, for recently he had joined the North-West London Literary and Debating Society. The Literary he said could go to the devil for all he cared, but give him the Debating. Also the society had a monthly journal.

PART II

INCIPIT VITA NOVA

" Will there never come a season

. . . .

When mankind shall be delivered
From the clash of magazines,
And the inkstand shall be shivered
Into countless smithereens :
When there stands a muzzled stripling
Mute, beside a muzzled bore ;
When the Rudyards cease from Kipling
And the Haggards Ride no more ? "

—J. K. STEPHEN

CHAPTER I

RUNNING IN BLANK

BULMER was twenty-one and yet he was very happy. Against the misty background of Blakeney, Sons & Co., who now paid him thirty-five shillings a week, and might one day pay him two pounds ten, there detached itself a rose-crowned pygmy, the Journal of the N.W. London Literary and Debating Society, the "Eldee" as its pet name went. The Journal had, for some years, existed in a troglodytic way, printed in smudgy type, its lines irregularly leaded, without columns, without paragraphs, without grace. It had published many reports of lectures, the main object of which was to record that Miss So-and-So was present, and that Mr. So-and-So proposed a vote of thanks. Once it had tried correspondence: "Is England in Decay?" but that soon died out because everybody thought that the works of man, except the Eldee, were in decay.

A spirit had to pass over the placid surface of those shallow waters. Bulmer, who entered the committee much as lava entered Pompei, found himself at first paralysed by amazement. He had not expected much of the committee, but he had not expected this; it needed a long life to make him realize that all committees, whether of the Eldee or of the Cabinet, are like this. Nobody talked about the Journal, but everybody talked about what he or she wanted to do to the Journal. Thus, Miss Murrow, who always looked virulent as she peered through her glasses, saw the Journal as a political instrument of broad progress. Miss Murrow was small,

thin, and an air of false authority was given her by her nose. She generally wore mittens, not because she was old-fashioned—oh, very far from that !—but because she was liable to chilblains. She used to enter Mrs. Tirril's drawing-room, where the meetings were held, trotting small as a mouse, smiling ingratiatingly, sit down full of consideration for the arm-chair, and then try to shrink into her own shadow. Following on this unobtrusive entry, Miss Murrow, in a thin and humble voice, would give vent to the most revolutionary sentiments. Men were beasts and ought to be shut up, the key of the prison being thrown into the sea. Marriage was a failure. The imposition of skirts on women was outrageous. (There was a flavour of bloomers about Miss Murrow ; she did not wear bloomers, but there was about her a latent bloomerishness.) As she had joined the Fabian Society and could combine in a single sentence Imperial Federation and Municipal Milk, she seemed quite a dangerous character. Also, she was the only member of the committee who smoked cigarettes. Miss Murrow's main trouble existed in Mrs. Tirril, a widow of thirty-five, Irish, fat, jolly, black-haired and blue-eyed, for Miss Murrow always felt that Mrs. Tirril was not public-spirited. Indeed, Mrs. Tirril read " The Yellow Book," and sometimes left it undesirably open. Miss Murrow thought that Aubrey Beardsley did not make for economic righteousness. But Mrs. Tirril was the only member who could lend the committee a room, for Miss Murrow kept house for two old parents who treated her, a spinster of fifty, like a child, and shrilly declared that her occupations were all stuff and nonsense, and that as for having committees in the house, cluttering it up with bits of paper and frightening the cat . . . well, they'd never heard of such a thing. It was no use asking Mr. Brill ; he concealed his discreet person in a boarding-house in Chalk Farm. The Journal went to him direct at the bank where he was a clerk ; when asked for his address he replied with an air of seraphic melancholy : " I am a stranger here, heaven is my home." As for Mr. Wartle's shop, Miss Murrow felt that a shop was not quite nice, and anyhow it would be depressing to sit among the coffins.

So she had to bear Mrs. Tirril. Indeed, soon after Bulmer joined the committee, Professor Stanton and his brow came to her house to lecture on Shakespeare's women. The forty odd members, two-thirds of them women, listened to the end, wept a little over the grief of Ophelia and Desdemona, pawns of a sable fate. Portia had raised in Miss Murrow an ungovernable desire to get up and say something, and she was restrained only by the majesty of the dome-like brow that gleamed white as if " sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought." Professor Stanton was a success. He had glided over Rosalind's male attire ; this, too, had stimulated in Miss Murrow a latent bloomerishness ! indeed, she broke out into a passionate defence of the rights of women which meandered away into a plea for " rational dress."

Bulmer volunteered to arrange the lecture for insertion in the Journal, but was thwarted by Mr. Wartle, a comfortable undertaker in Kilburn High Road. He had difficulties with Mr. Wartle. The undertaker was a very large, heavy man of about fifty, who could not succeed in assuming the melancholy expression required by his profession. He was born pink, but grew up red ; he had repressed his lower nature, as represented by smoking concerts ; he let his hair grow long and oiled it straight down. He wore a moustache and whiskers, and combed these straight down. But it was no good : secret jollity expressed itself obscene in his brown and unprofessional eyes. It was this secret cheerfulness which thrust Mr. Wartle into the company of Great Writers and Great Thoughts. And it was this caused his animosity to dawn, because Bulmer said that Tennyson was all rot. He also said that if Emerson did say that if a man could make the best coat or write the best book humanity would tread a path to his door, well then, Emerson was a damn fool. People didn't tread paths to your door unless you stuck red signposts with green spots all the way to that door. Also, Bulmer, having forgotten to take notes at the meeting, did not enter Mr. Wartle among those who were present. And as Mr. Wartle felt it would be undignified to complain, he grew much more angry than he would have been if he had done so.

Miss Murrow was not pleased because Bulmer put in verses by Brill. She considered verses emollient, and deliquescent—all that sort of thing. Indeed, they were not very good verses. Brill was very young, and his pimples were so many that he could not release his spirit through love. So his spirit stayed in prison in the bank, and Bulmer printed a poem by him which began :

> " My heart is as a pale white flower,
> That seeks a haven in a bower,
> Where rosy lips and lily hands
> May soothe the efflux of my sands. . . . "

Brill was very pleased. Also Mr. Wartle acknowledged that, as Bulmer put it, " poetry puts ginger into things, makes the page look less like a slab of meat." And Mrs. Tirril was pleased because in one line Brill put an " s " on to breast : she felt that the society was at last making a bolt into freedom.

Indeed, Bulmer became a successful editor, for he soon realized that what people wanted was to see themselves in print. So, in time, Mr. Wartle did see his " Rambles with Ruskin " in print. And Mrs. Tirril published " Memories of my Childhood." She followed this up with " Memories of My Girlhood " ; then the series stopped on a strong representation from Miss Murrow.

So Bulmer was not affected by all that went on at home ; also, nothing was happening there, except that Mr. Verden had gone back to Germany, and that, after believing he had taken her heart with him, Henrietta rediscovered the organ under the influence of the new lodger, Mr. Cocking. Mr. Cocking was rather like Mr. Wartle, in that he also had been born pink, but he had grown up purple. And if he brushed his hair up instead of down, it was because he had turned into a commercial traveller instead of an undertaker. His thoughts were therefore more centred on this world. Mr. Cocking was at home only for week-ends ; there was in this something adventurous that moved Henrietta, and when once he referred to himself as a knight of the road, a romantic halo descended on Sir Galahad Cocking, her Galahad . . . who could say, perhaps her Lancelot ?

Mr. Cocking liked Henrietta, who, nearly thirty, was not ill-looking; he liked her all the more because he hated Eleanor, and when he arrived home on a Saturday afternoon the sound of his cheery "Hullo, hullo! here we are again!" in the hall caused, as one of Henrietta's novels put it, "the imprisoned bird to beat its way into the future through the iron bars of her heart."

Bulmer liked Cocking because Cocking knew about ink, in which he travelled, and often they went out on a Sunday afternoon, conversing on exciting topics: advertisements, the speed of trains, and the cost of buildings. Indeed, his mother spoke to Richard about it:

"I haven't anything against Mr. Cocking. He is a little bluff, but a very nice man. Only he's never in the house. The poor man might as well have no home. If you hadn't gone out with him last night—well, Hettie had brought back 'A Venetian Notebook,' with illustrations. I'm sure he'd have liked her to show him the pictures."

Mr. Cocking contributed to Henrietta's album. His square head perspiringly held between his fat hands, he could think only of one lyric:

> "Fifteen girls and a parson tight,
> Toddling home in the dead of night
> In a row."

But he felt this was unsuitable for a young lady. In the end he had to copy something out of "Jokes, Card Tricks and Entertainments."

And time went on, and the Journal went on. And its circulation rose from forty-two to fifty-six, and the lady member who was modest wrote a short story signed "Daffodil." Things were going well, and Mrs. Tirril gave an evening party to all the members and their friends, and provided squashed-fly biscuits and lemonade. (A little claret-cup for the committee.) The Society was getting on, for a neighbouring cleric had brought several females who sat in a row (and made Bulmer giggle, for they recalled Cocking's lyric). He was an entertaining cleric, rosy, middle-aged, round-faced, and hovered humorously. He asked Mr. Wartle:

" What's a woman's worth ? " and when the undertaker gave it up, replied : " Double you, O man." Bulmer was very busy, for he was taking notes of the costumes, this notion having been given him by the " Lady's Pictorial." It was bound to be popular. So he went round sedulously : Miss Murrow, pink cashmere . . . noted also a chaste arrangement of purple velvet and real lace. . . . He heard the cleric recite a limerick :

> " There is an old man of Uttoxeter,
> Who's a wife and throws boots and socks at her ;
> And when the poor saint
> Goes off in a faint,
> The brute absolutely mocks at her."

Mr. Wartle took him aside to insist on his inserting an article on " What we should strive for."

" Circulation's all we've got to strive for," said Bulmer.

" There are deeper ends, higher ends."

" Ends can't be higher and deeper at the same time," said Bulmer. Then, subtly : " You don't feel inclined to give us an advertisement, do you ? "

Mr. Wartle looked meditatively at the assembly. He wondered if it would pay. Some of them were pretty old. But surely their relatives would come to him for a coffin, anyway. It was the least they could do for the Eldee.

Mrs. Tirril, flushed and flattered, was pinned in a corner by the cleric, who recited :

> " In Denmark there was a young Dane, dear,
> Who wanted to ride on a reindeer.
> He said : ' Does it jolt ? '
> They said : ' Yes, watch it bolt ' ;
> It did. They buried him in Spain, dear."

" Oh, you naughty man ! " said Mrs. Tirril, and, skilfully disengaging herself, pretended to dance to the sound of castanets. She was very good-looking that night, though rather large in her low-cut bodice of electric blue with enormous puff sleeves. As Miss Murrow put it : " If I was as fat as that I shouldn't wear such tight bodices." But Miss Murrow wasn't fat, and therefore had good reason to dress loosely.

Still the lemonade poured forth, and a young lady played on the violin, and as soon as she began everybody bellowed. And Bulmer at last succeeded in getting Wartle to promise fifteen shillings for a page advertisement. And the success of the party mounted up and up, for the cleric sang a song full of innocent merriment of which the chorus was :

" A, B, C, D,
Sing it all with me !
A, B, C, D,
All along with me ! "

" What we want," thought Bulmer, " is something to ginger it up. Something nippy. Nippy notes, that's what we want, nippy notes." He glared at Mr. Wartle, for the undertaker did not conceal his animosity. Nippy notes ! He'd nip him when he'd got that fifteen shillings out of him.

CHAPTER II

THE ANIMOSITY OF MR. WARTLE

ON a December Sunday afternoon Bulmer found Henrietta in tears. His sister sat by the window, propping up on her left hand her rather worn profile, while her right arm hung helplessly by her side, except that from time to time she raised her hand to dab at her eyes or blow her nose with a handkerchief rolled into a grey ball. Richard had inherited the dining-room rights from his father, and now, on Sunday afternoons, he used to sit there to prepare the Journal. So, until he saw that she was crying, he resented his sister's presence. But a loud sniff made him look up, and he realized, with a little disturbance, her pathetic attitude. She was staring into vacancy, and light snow was falling. The snow was, in a sense, appropriate. Bulmer got up and put his arm round her, saying:

"What's the matter, old girl?" upon which Henrietta pillowed her head upon his breast and wept much louder.

"There, there," he said consolingly, patting her head in the clumsy way that men have with women whom they do not usually caress. "It'll be all right," he added without conviction. "What's the matter?"

Henrietta did not reply, but turned a few leaves of the open album. At last she sobbed: "I'm very unhappy."

He bent down to kiss her hot, humid cheek. He did not know what to do, did not understand that he should hold her to him, say nothing, ask nothing, let her cry, wait until this relieved her, giving her, meanwhile, the comfort of his contact.

"What's the matter?" he said. "What's happened? Why are you unhappy?"

"Nothing," said Henrietta in a muffled voice. As Bulmer did not question her she must have unconsciously feared that he would not do so, for her tears began to

flow faster, and in one long sentence without stops she told him the story.

"Cocking!" said Bulmer. "Well, I'm blowed!"

"Oh, I did love him so!" said Henrietta. Bulmer thought of Mr. Verden, but said nothing. He thought her feeble, but he was genuinely sorry for her, and so again fell to kissing her and pressing her hand.

"I thought he had such a kind heart," said Henrietta. "Look at the nice thing he wrote in my album." She read aloud:

> "The kettle sings cheerily from the hearth;
> Darby helps Joan with her homely task.
> And Joan chats to Darby of the days that are past,
> Till their dear old hearts beat hard and fast
> As they did in the long ago . . ."

"Oh, I can't bear it!" moaned Henrietta, and wept again.

Bulmer was rather embarrassed. He was too young, however well-meaning, to know exactly what to do with a tearful female. At last an idea struck him. He freed himself, went upstairs, and on returning slipped into Henrietta's nerveless hand a very sticky bag of coco-nut bar, the coco-nut bar that he still loved almost as much as cigarettes. Henrietta smiled, freed the bar from most of the paper, and gently began to nibble it, leaving pink marks upon the pages which she listlessly turned, as in gentler melancholy she lived again in the long ago.

"Hettie's a silly fool," said Eleanor, when Richard asked her to be nice to her sister for a day or two. "Silly sheep! mooning about like that."

"She was in love with him," said Bulmer solemnly. A misty desire for love was very strong in him. Annie and her successors had often brought him to a state when he could glimpse love, like a tenuous nymph through a ghostly thicket. Yet always, when he sought to grasp the nymph, he found only the hardness of soft flesh.

"You're as big an idiot as she is," said Eleanor. "Don't worry about her. She likes being miserable." Bulmer did not trouble about Henrietta as much as he would have wanted to, beyond taking her to Drury Lane, and once to the Geological Museum in Jermyn

Street. This latter was not a success, because they found a couple kissing on the other side of a case containing shales and allied schistous rock; this recalled to Henrietta the lost long ago. Besides, he had troubles of his own, for Mrs. Bulmer was beginning a solid attack on the Journal. She realized that she could not forbid a young man of twenty-two to run a magazine in his spare time, but she had a painful power of allusion: "Going for a walk to-night, Dick? No? Oh, of course, the Journal. Such a pity! Such a nice evening!" Or: "Did you think that was quite a nice story by Mrs. Tirril? I thought it rather a pity, that reference to the lady in satin, but of course one must have something for everybody in a magazine. I think it is a pity, but of course you know best." Or again: "What a pity you can't work up a little book-keeping, Dick. I'm sure it would be useful. But, of course, there is the Journal; I know you haven't got time." It was indirect, and therefore it was maddening. Also, as time went on, Mrs. Bulmer developed a side-attack which consisted in "seeing his father coming out."

One day, when Mrs. Bulmer found two copies of the Journal ready for post in the hall, and stamped with stamps for which Richard had paid, she said: "I always thought that stamps were office expenses, but of course you don't care, Dick. Twopence here, twopence there, it all mounts up. But, of course, you don't mind; it's your poor father coming out."

Bulmer swore silently, and said, "I don't know why you're always talking of my father like that. You used to stick up for him when he was alive."

"It's different now," said Mrs. Bulmer. "When your poor father was alive I had to see to it that his children respected him."

Upon which Bulmer, defeated, left the room. He was not metaphysical enough to wonder why the respect that makes calamity of so long a life has no practical value when life has departed. Besides, he was really busy. Already he was selling about a hundred and twenty copies a month, and, if it had not been for Mr. Wartle, he would have felt very self-satisfied. Only Mr. Wartle was an agnostic, and when Bulmer began to make arrangements with the local

churches to circulate the magazine at their meetings, giving them a commission on the sale, Mr. Wartle thought it necessary to make remarks :

" I think," said Mr. Wartle, composing his cheerful countenance to the required gloom, " that we have a Duty in these things. We should set our faces against bigotry and superstition. We ought to be a Rational Influence."

Bulmer murmured something about printers' bills not being paid out of Rational Influence, but Mr. Wartle rolled on disapprovingly.

" I am sorry to have to say that I fear the Journal is conducted on the wrong lines."

" But, hang it all," said Bulmer, " we're not taking sides. We aren't only selling it at the parish meetings ; I've got hold of the Catholics, and of the Congregationalists, and the Baptists, and I'm negotiating with the Presbyterians. But they want too much."

" I am sorry I must express my disapproval. I should not object if the paper were merely sold to those benighted people, but you get nothing for nothing. I see you have arranged addresses by the various ministers."

" Well, how do you think I'm going to get their flocks to buy the magazine if I don't report their pastors ? " said Bulmer.

" Clergymen are not a Good Influence," said Mr. Wartle. " They introduce superstition into their lectures."

" But, good heavens ! " said Bulmer, " the vicar is going to speak on the Dutch school of painting. Can't do any harm with that."

" You never know," said Mr. Wartle, and entertained Bulmer with dark stories of Jesuit propaganda, and of dead babies buried in convent gardens.

" Oh, go and boil yourself ! " said Bulmer.

Mr. Wartle retired with dignity, but his propaganda against Bulmer grew continuous and stealthy. Miss Murrow became a Wartleite after a grand committee where Bulmer refused to crowd out the Presbyterian minister and to substitute an article by Mr. Wartle on " Great Thoughts and Great Thinkers."

" We've had all that stuff before," said Bulmer.

" You can never have too much," retorted Mr. Wartle,

" We want some Bernard Shaw," cried Miss Murrow.

" Never heard of him," said Bulmer.

" You will," replied Miss Murrow.

" Well, until I do," said Bulmer, " I'll go on selling fifty copies a month to the Presbyterians, please."

Mrs. Tirril intervened to champion Roman Catholicism, which, she said, was so decorative. That made matters worse. As for Mr. Brill, he became a nominal Wartleite, but secretly contributed verse under a pseudonym.

At bottom Bulmer did not worry much. The magazine was doing well. It was over the five hundred, and when, a few weeks later, he captured the Radical Club, the Conservative Club, and the local Temperance Society, his circulation hovered round the thousand.

Indeed, the Journal was occupying him more and more ; it filled a semi-idle year at the office. He was not unhappy at Blakeney, Sons & Co., except that he made few friends. He found people slow. Mr. Gorgie, the head clerk, was a great nuisance. For Mr. Gorgie, who wore sorrowful white whiskers, worshipped a private deity : " The God That Gets Things Done In A Regular Fashion." Almost every day he offered up Bulmer on the altar of this god in a perpetually smoking holocaust. Bulmer did not cross his t's, and it was maddening to see Mr. Gorgie carefully read one of his statements, crossing every one of the t's. Also he wanted the sign £ placed exactly between the lines of the paper. And on another occasion :

" Bulmer," he said, " I do wish that you would draw the final double line under the total in such a way that one black line comes above the blue line of the paper and the other one below. It looks better."

The others, according to their age and position, modelled themselves on Mr. Gorgie, and if it had not been for his friend Alf Hawes, Bulmer would have, so he told him, bent the ledger on the old beast's head, and gone for a soldier. But Alf Hawes was a great comfort. He was a rakish young man, some years older than Bulmer, who wore check trousers and fancy ties ; he was no end of a masher, and several times a week came in with subtly lurid stories of his doings Up West. Sometimes Bulmer accompanied him on his

modish buccaneering, and then they played billiards in a saloon near Seven Dials, or they found friends and joined arms, proceeding up Coventry Street, loudly singing. Once somebody turned up with a concertina, and they caused a disturbance in Leicester Square. Or they ended up at the Monico, where Hawes drank whisky and water, throwing cigarette ash over his shoulder, while Bulmer ate tricoloured Neapolitan ices, which he loved.

As for the office, as Hawes put it, it was no good for this child. And only show him a better job, he'd be on it like a bird. He was sympathetic about the Journal, and even sent in a contribution entitled: "Thick Nights in Town." After some meditation, Bulmer decided not to print it. Also Hawes persuaded him to introduce him to Mrs. Tirril, and, as this friendship increased, Hawes tilted his hat more sideways, and hinted vaguely that women who were said to have a past might very well have a present too.

Fundamentally, though, he agreed with Bulmer that something was lacking in the Journal, and together they analysed an early copy of "Answers." The results of this consideration produced some trouble with Mr. Wartle, for Hawes expounded them to him in Mrs. Tirril's drawing-room where, one evening, they were sitting each other out. Mrs. Tirril, very flattered, fanned herself and smiled at them through the ostrich feathers. Hawes proclaimed Bulmer's view that the Journal wanted more snap.

"I never heard of such a thing," cried Mr. Wartle. "Snap, indeed! Did Emerson have snap?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Hawes.

"Did Tennyson have snap?" Mr. Wartle rolled on. "Did Walter Scott have snap? Mrs. Tirril, I put it to you: shall we leave the Journal of what was once a society intended to lead to better things in the hands of people who will vulgarize it to the level of 'Pick-Me-Up'?"

"I'm sure there's a great deal in what you say," said Mrs. Tirril, and smiled at him through her fan. Then she looked sideways at Hawes and smiled as if to say that reward would not fail his patience if he were patient enough.

CHAPTER III

"ZIP"

THE insertion of snappiness into a Journal where, until then, dignity had given no chance to impudence, considerably increased the animosity of Mr. Wartle. Bulmer, who was not very susceptible to implied censure, realized it rather late, when Mr. Wartle had been going round the society with solemn eyes and drooping jaw, thus elaborately maintaining sorrow upon his naturally jovial features. Mr. Wartle was —lowering. And as his anger rose he manufactured visions of himself as a tiger about to spring, or as a bull about to bay. (Was it bulls that bayed? Oh, never mind!) While Bulmer sought snappiness, Mr. Wartle gave him his first political lesson; that is to say, while Bulmer worked, Mr. Wartle lobbied. The undertaker caught the society in detail. He deplored to Miss Murrow that her excellent article on "William Morris and the Craft Spirit" had been cut; he exhibited his devotion to the new social order which Miss Murrow represented, said a few words about editors who were born vulgarians, and left Miss Murrow labouring under a sense of heavy wrong at the hands of Bulmer. Mr. Brill proved quite easy, for the young poet was afraid of Mr. Wartle, because the undertaker reminded him of his manager at the bank, and that sort of man awed him. He always vaguely felt that Mr. Wartle might sack him. So he scratched his pimples and said "Yes" to everything.

The conspirator found Mrs. Tirril more difficult, for the widow had a regrettable taste for snappiness. She liked "To-day," and found Mr. Jerome K. Jerome very amusing. She adored "Pick-Me-Up," and was always urging Bulmer to emulate the raciness of "Modern Society." So, while Mr. Wartle boomed in whispers about the duty of the society to raise the intellectual

tone of mankind, she only smiled and used her fine blue eyes to break the line of his argument.

When he had done, she said: "Dear Mr. Wartle, aren't you . . . well, a teeny wee bit old-fashioned? This is 1893, you know. We must be modern."

"Vulgarity," said Mr. Wartle, "is unfortunately modern. But do we want that sort of modernity in the Journal?"

They argued for a long time, and it was only by a fluke that Mr. Wartle won. He referred to a contribution by Alf Hawes, and said something about common young men whose life would not bear inspection. Delicately pressed, and quite unconscious of pressure, Mr. Wartle then revealed that Alf Hawes had a little affair with the girl in the fish shop near Edgware Road Station. Mrs. Tirril became meditative, and by degrees grew filled with a sense of intolerable outrage; night after night she had listened to Hawes playing the flute—for this! Then her thoughts passed to Bulmer: he never came to see her. Perhaps he did not play the flute. But, for sure, a young man might come for other reasons.

Mr. Wartle rolled on, and Mrs. Tirril brooded over Hawes, who was faithless, and Bulmer, who was not even that. So Mrs. Tirril became a Wartleite. One evening in the next week, when Bulmer was summoned by the committee to show cause why he should not remove the snappiness, everybody talked enormously except Bulmer, who looked bored, and Brill, who scratched. Notably, there was a new member, an elder of a local church, who had never attended a committee meeting before, and so had many lines of policy to lay down. Richard sat and listened to the recital of his sins. Miss Murrow thought that the Journal had gone down considerably. When she had first known it, it was devoted to the cause of progress and modern thought. It printed only articles on Socialism and De Morgan tiles, and it had interesting correspondences on the decay of art. Now! Now! it was becoming the medium of catchpenny vulgarity. The accounts of the Society's lectures were scandalously meagre. Great public questions, such as the municipalization of milk and the transport of fish, were entirely ignored. More-

over, there were features in the magazine which she objected to. For instance . . . Miss Murrow stopped suddenly, for she was about to make some remarks about the memories of Mrs. Tirril's childhood, to say nothing of her girlhood, when she remembered that Mrs. Tirril was Sound. . . . Anyhow there were features which were obviously undesirable.

She went on for a long time. Bulmer considered the little spinster and thought that, in spite of the spectacles which virilized her, she did not look at all like Vesta Tilley as the Piccadilly Johnnie with a glass eye. Caring not at all what Miss Murrow thought, he was able to analyse her with some sagacity. As the little spinster grew shriller and shriller, Bulmer realized her (in other words) as one of those people who are restricted within their emancipations. While his sisters went round and round, scrubbing the stairs, or giving piano lessons, like a couple of squirrels in a cage, Miss Murrow had escaped from the home cage to manufacture another one with many bars. One bar was called Modern Thought, another Progress, another Democracy, another Freedom (but she didn't mean it), and in this highly intellectualized cage Miss Murrow went round and round, chasing her tail with desperate intentness, and without the slightest chance of ever catching it.

"That sort," thought Bulmer, "doesn't matter." So he ruled her out and listened to Mr. Wartle, who was now sorrowfully booming in his accustomed style.

"What I particularly object to," said Mr. Wartle, "is the Tone, Mr. Bulmer. For instance, that headline: I hardly like to repeat it before ladies."

"I don't mind repeating it," said Bulmer. "What's the matter with it? 'Join Us! We're a Live Lot.' Well, aren't we a live lot?"

"That is not the question," said Mr. Wartle.

"Oh, yes it is. We are a live lot. Miss Murrow, aren't we a live lot?"

"Please address your remarks to Mr. Wartle," said Miss Murrow.

"Oh, Mr. Wartle's business influences him," said Bulmer. "He's a dead lot."

Mr. Wartle smote the little bamboo table and bellowed something confused about personalities, but he was

interrupted by Mrs. Tirril, who asked him where he had learnt to swear before ladies. So Mr. Wartle retired in confusion, and henceforth hated Bulmer the more because Bulmer had caused him to break the commandment: "Thou shalt be refined." Yet Mrs. Tirril did not prove a Bulmerite. Her point was that the magazine was too heavy; it wasn't like "Pick-Me-Up," but more like "Drop-Me-Quick."

When they had done, there was a long silence. Everybody expected Bulmer to reply, and everybody wanted him to, for the committee did not wish him to resign: if he did, somebody else would have the bother of running the magazine for nothing. They were prepared, if he did try to resign, to soothe him and flatter him. But Bulmer said nothing; he merely stared at them with as much curiosity as he did at the beetles and butterflies in the taxidermist's case in Kilburn High Road. At last the elder could bear it no more and said over again everything the others had said. Then there was another silence, and Miss Murrow asked Bulmer if he had nothing to say.

After a moment Bulmer got up and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I haven't anything much to say. Except that all this is twaddle. I am the editor of this magazine, and I am going to edit it. Also I don't think much of it. It wants something more. It wants . . . Zip!"

"Zip!" said Mr. Wartle feebly.

"Zip," said Bulmer, solemnly. "Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I wish you . . . plenty of Zip." And, picking up his hat, he walked out.

The committee sat for a little while after Bulmer's departure.

"What do you think he's going to do?" said Miss Murrow.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mr. Wartle gloomily.

"What do you think he means by Zip?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Wartle. "Let's look it up in the dictionary."

They could not find it in the dictionary, and so, by being unknown, Zip acquired greater terrors. Except for Mrs. Tirril. There was about the word something pleasing, for she was sensitive to onomatopœia.

Meanwhile Bulmer walked home, not only sending

the committee to hell, but arriving at profound realizations. For the first time he saw himself in the world by seeing himself inside a committee. He realized clearly the abnormality of people on committees. It struck him that these people had formed the committee for five years, and that nobody ever stood against them. Therefore nobody else wanted to be on the committee. Therefore committees were always minorities. Therefore, and here he was flooded with a conviction denied by Ibsen: the majority is always right. A hot feeling of enthusiasm rose in Bulmer as he thought of the magazine, the majority, stormy, many-headed, inarticulate, resplendent, the majority, beautiful and glorious, hundreds of them, millions of them, millions of people all alike, who'd think what they were told, and buy what they were told, and roll over the silly little minority like an elephant wallowing on a toad. He walked along Carlton Vale, swinging his arms and mouthing joyful speeches. His soul was full of idolatry. His heart felt all soft and open as he embraced the full sweetness of that majority which was always right, of that majority which could spring into life as the Sleeping Beauty under the kiss of Prince Charming, if only one gave it a little Zip.

Then Bulmer ceased to meditate, for he never meditated long, and, running up to his bedroom, prepared the headline for the new issue. The first line, in the usual lettering, ran:

JOURNAL OF THE N.W. LONDON LITERARY AND DEBATING SOCIETY.

Below this came, in colossal lettering:

WE WANT MORE ZIP.

Then, content with his work, he went to bed, and, next day, at Thomas's Chop House, had a long conference with Hawes. Results were immediate. The Journal was given Zip. As the members were thought too stupid, half the next issue was written by Bulmer and Hawes. Until then the opening notes had appeared under the title: "Thoughts of the Day." These were converted into: "Our Naughty Notes," and though they had to be padded out with the usual announcements

of local lectures and books of the month, they were made palatable by special paragraphs. These gave a good deal of trouble, for Bulmer's method was to look up the encyclopædia and see whether anybody had ever borne the names of his victims. Mr. Wartle apparently had no ancestors, and so Hawes had to touch him up in a dialogue where the undertaker figured as Rosa Dartle and was questioned on this point: "Would Higher Education Increase the Length of Human Life?" If so, would he still press for higher education? Occasionally the unfortunate Rosa Dartle didn't know and was made to plead that she was so volatile.

Mrs. Tirril was more easily managed, because Father Tyrrell had just become known, and so a strange compound of orientalism and of Jesuitical practice was fastened upon the widow. As for Miss Murrow, they extracted some verses from Brill, who became a Bulmerite when required. As they were printed to rhyme with such words as "furrow" and "burrow," the verses went very well. And, to make the paper more emphatic, Bulmer printed at the bottom of every page:

"We want more Zip."

The convulsions within the Society did not reach Bulmer. At bottom, the Society was delighted, for it hated its committee, and yet never stood against it, as they did not want to do any work. So they enjoyed seeing the committee touched up. Also, while deploring the tone, Mrs. Tirril was much amused by the references to Mr. Wartle and Miss Murrow. They too, enjoyed her immolation. But when, in the next issue, a jokes column was contributed by Hawes, and a horrid riddle reading: "When is a door not a door?" "When it's an egress," was printed as a tail piece to Professor Stanton's article: "Fragments from Herrick," the committee began to boil. At last Mr. Wartle's paper on "Mens sana in corpore sano" was returned with a slip reading:

JOURNAL OF THE N.W. LONDON LITERARY AND DEBATING SOCIETY.

(WE WANT MORE ZIP.)

Declined with thanks,

a general meeting of the Society was called to take place in Mrs. Tirril's drawing-room.

Bulmer, sitting with Hawes, listened to denunciations of his conduct and was unabashed, though all eyes were turned on him when Mr. Wartle put the motion that he be asked to resign.

" Before putting this motion," said the elder, who was in the chair, " I think you will wish to hear Mr. Bulmer on his defence."

The young man got up quite readily, smiled at the assembly, and said :

" When I took over this magazine about one in ten of you read it. And that one wouldn't have bought it if it hadn't been thrown in with the annual subscription. Do you read it now ? "

" Yes," said one or two voices.

" I think it's disgraceful," said somebody else.

" Don't interrupt," said Bulmer, quite unconscious that he had invited them to speak. " For I have very little to say. I say that Journal wants Zip. It's got it. If you like the magazine as I have made it, you'll vote against Rosa Dartle " (a few giggles) ; " if you don't like the magazine you'll vote against me. Now put your motion."

The elder deplored that personalities should be introduced. This was a question of policy, not of persons.

" Oh, yes it is," cried Bulmer, jumping up again. " Everything in this world's a question of persons. People think they vote for policy, they don't. They vote for men. People don't vote Liberal, they vote for Rosebery. They don't vote Unionist, they vote for Salisbury. And so, to-night, you've got to vote for me or Rosa Dartle. Be kind to her, she's so volatile."

Half the meeting laughed, and for a long time the question could not be put because various young men wanted to deliver humorous speeches, while serious young women were disgusted by all this vulgarity. Also the elder had many things to say which had been said before. When at last the question was put and Mr. Wartle's motion declared carried on a show of hands, the majority was so small that the meeting immediately broke up into four or five groups, for the purpose of

furious argument, while the elder vainly tolled a dinner bell. It was Bulmer pulled the meeting together by jumping on a chair and bawling :

" Ladies and gentlemen ! I've got the sack because I want to put Zip into this magazine. Well, I've done with it, but I've not done with myself. I say the world wants Zip, and the world shall have it."

A few minutes later Bulmer and Hawes walked down Maida Vale. It was a bright moonlit night, against which houses and trees stood out like lace. A soft calm rose. But Bulmer strode on, teeth clenched, and Hawes, thinking he was angry, said nothing. When they reached the corner of Carlton Vale and were about to say good night, Hawes said :

" Dick, what's Zip ? "

Bulmer stared at him. " Zip ? I don't know. But the public'll want to know."

" How do you mean, the public ? "

Bulmer did not look at him. With broad eyes he stared down Maida Vale where the gas lamps trembled like fireflies, and up which echoed the weary trot of the bus horses, broken by the rapid clip-trop-trop of hansoms returning from the theatres. The sound of traffic filled him with a delicious sense of life. People ! Lots of people. Horses, and machines, and facts, and things. All round him millions of people, and millions of houses. It was like being a little animal picked up by a large friendly hand. He filled his lungs with the warm air. It was as if he embraced the City, London that lay about him good-humoured and negligent, with her long, slow limbs and her puerile indolence.

" Alf," he whispered, " I've got an idea. Why drop it ? "

" How do you mean, why drop it ? You've got the push, haven't you ? "

" Oh, I don't mean all those silly sheep. I mean this Zip idea. Why drop it ? Why don't we start a magazine and call it ' Zip ' ? "

The two young men looked at each other seriously. Through the practical mind of Hawes ran the idea that the first subscribers would probably be some of the silly sheep. That would give 'em a start, but Bulmer was carried away by an ungovernable excitement : for the

first time he was faced with the idea that perhaps he might possess a magazine, something that would be his, that would embody him. He was thrilled by a sudden inrush of emotion, as if there were revealed to him a delight which he had suspected, yet never known. He was as a maiden on her bridal journey, all filled with this revelation. And if he had had mystic imagination, he might have seen in the blue-black sky that overhung Maida Vale the magic word Zip painted in letters of fire upon the scattered, fleecy clouds, as at the hour of her death Félicité pictured in the heavens the Holy Ghost in the shape of her pet parrot.

CHAPTER IV

VI

BULMER closed the front door with a pleasant sense of emergence into a lighter world. Behind him he left not only the hard December day, the east wind that caught up dust and soiled paper in crackling whirlwinds at street corners, but also his weekly world, without savour or enterprise, Blakeney, Sons & Co., the meaningless mercantilism of it all, meaningless because he did not direct it. And here, at home, this Saturday afternoon, he was to clasp, warm and fugitive as the dusky sweetness of a woman, this little shadow of what would soon be rich reality. As he hung up his hat he thought: "Two hours without anybody to bother." For Mrs. Bulmer and Henrietta were at a *matinée* at Daly's, having doubtless waited outside the pit door and there eaten their sandwiches. Only Eleanor would be at home, partly because she sniffed at any comedy that called itself "The Shopgirl," "The Dancing Girl," or any sort of girl, partly because, as Mrs. Bulmer put it, the house could not be left. But she would not worry him. He could hear her in the drawing-room, struggling with the second movement of the Moonlight Sonata, and breaking down viciously.

So the dining-room was his. Generally he worked in his bedroom to avoid quarrels with his mother. But to-day he wanted the dining-room table, for the occasion was historic: he was to choose the shape and cover of "Zip." A little self-conscious, he laid his papers upon the table, and only when he sat down did he notice, squatting on the floor by the window, a figure which had turned its head for a moment and glanced at him, then bent down again to work. It was the upholsteress. For Mrs. Bulmer had at last realized that the horsehair was bursting out of the couch and that Mr. Bulmer's

arm-chair was in such a state that it was not safe to let a neighbour in. As the drawing-room was not always ready for visitors, something had to be done. So the upholsteress was basting loose covers of brown cretonne with blue flowers, which Mrs. Bulmer said were not as pretty as they might be, but wouldn't show the dirt. For a moment Bulmer hesitated This was a day when he wanted to be alone. He did not fear disturbance, for he could think clearly in Charing Cross Station if he thought of his own affairs; but, that afternoon, a certain sense of sacredness was upon him. He would go upon his knees to his monster. And that woman on the floor, the clipping noises she made with the scissors, annoyed him. But he knew he would not get the right effect on his washhand-stand. The drawing-room? with Eleanor murdering that music? No. Resolutely he spread out the dummy sheets and the coloured covers, tried to absorb himself. Yes, that was a good green. But he thought:

"'Tit-Bits' green. Of course, that wouldn't matter . . . but if 'Zip' got on the stalls it would. Even though 'Zip' was only to be a monthly. What about orange?" Then a faint sound on his left disturbed him. It went on. The woman was humming. Actually humming! Damn her! He glanced sideways at the upholsteress, who, tacking the cover, went on:

"I don't want to play in *your* yard,
I don't like you any mo-er!
You'll be sorry when you see me
Swinging on our garden door . . ."

Irritating. But what was he to do? Then he noticed that the door was shut and remembered that his mother always liked the door open when there was a stranger in the room, because you never knew. So he opened it and sat down again. As he did this he saw the woman better, and her face pleased him. He guessed that she was rather short but very broad, agreeably so. As she bent he saw that her neck was dark and thick, and that from her hair faint, black down ran to her collar. He had a glimpse of rather coarse lips and a foreshortened nose, fine dark eyes, which for a moment met his. But the devotional mood was still upon him, and once more

he sat down. But she disturbed him. He found himself listening as she went on :

" You shan't holler down our rain-barrel,
You shan't climb our apple-tree.
I don't want to play in *your* yard
If you won't be good to *me*."

He concentrated on the idea of money. It was all very well, but he possessed very little : forty-eight pounds saved up somehow during the years, and ten pounds borrowed from Hawes. And to obtain this ten pounds he had had to bully and cajole Hawes into believing that if he became a journalist he would get orders for the theatres. Fifty-eight pounds ! And an issue, say five thousand to start with, wouldn't cost less than twenty-two pounds. That left thirty-six pounds working capital with which to meet the cost of distribution and of the next issue. He'd have to make at least thirty pounds out of cash sales on the first issue. As for advertisements . . . he couldn't tell until he saw Hawes. Then the woman stood up. As she did so Bulmer noticed with a thrill the fine, full curves of her body, and two strong, dark hands which she placed on her hips as she stood back from the arm-chair, rejoicing, it seemed, in her work. Then she turned and said :

" That's not bad, is it ? "

Bulmer looked at the arm-chair with an air of profound criticism, and said, " No, it looks all right. Bit loose over the left arm, don't you think ? "

" Do you think so ? " said the woman, patting the left arm. " No, it's not loose. It'll settle. Look," and she patted it into place.

Bulmer came closer and said vaguely, " Oh, yes, you're right." He was conscious of her rather more violently, of her deliberate air, and much more of the pleasant animality of her, the suggestion of abundant blood running under her dark skin ; on the cheeks lay an apricot flush. He decided that she was ugly, and at the same time rested upon her a disturbed gaze. She smiled, and he liked her good irregular teeth.

" Well," she said, " that's done. Now for the sofa. That's a job." He watched her go to the sofa and

measure it roughly. She interested him, but his major preoccupation ousted her.

"Well," he said with false ease, "I suppose you must go on with your work and I with mine." But he went on looking at her, as if an instinct in him bade him force her to ask him what this work was. He couldn't very well tell her: "I am Richard Bulmer. I am creating a magazine. I am a great man." But a sense of the appropriate told him that she ought to want to know those things. And, marvellously, she did not fail him, for, with half unconcern, she said:

"Oh, I suppose you mean all those papers!"

"Yes."

"What are those coloured bits?"

"Those," said Bulmer, at last gaining relief, "are the proposed covers of my new magazine. It's called 'Zip.' Of course you haven't heard of it yet—but you will."

"I'm sure I will," said the woman, smiling. "I read lots of them. I do love 'Answers.'"

"Yes, yes," said Bulmer hurriedly, "'Answers' is all right. But we want something new. Something with more Zip."

The dark eyes opened as she said: "What is Zip?"

"Zip?" said Bulmer. "Oh, well, it's not easy to explain! It means something with a lot of go. It means that—that you're on it like a bird. See what I mean? The latest, and a bit later than the latest, if you can work it."

"Oh!" said the woman. "I see what you mean; something that's bang up to date."

"You've got it," said Bulmer, delighted. "Mind you, it's not going to be a newspaper, only a monthly. But it'll be all about the things that are in the newspapers. The things that everybody's talking about."

"That's the idea," said the woman. "How clever of you to think of it."

"Oh, no!" said Bulmer, "there's nothing clever about it. One only had to think of it."

"What are you going to put in it?" said the woman. "Perhaps you oughtn't to tell me, but I do so want to know."

"There's no harm in telling you," said Bulmer.

"We want everybody to know. There's going to be jokes, and funny stories, and facts, oh, thousands of facts. If there's a coronation going on, we'll tell you all about the other coronations, where they happened, and who was there, and what they wore. If there's a good murder, we'll tell you how other famous murders were done. And who was killed. And by whom, and why it happened. And lots of interesting things, things like . . . oh! anything; how many cases of butterflies came into the country from Borneo, or how to tell an oak from a beech by the leaves, or—or, anything, everything. The things everybody wants to know."

"Aren't there going to be any love stories?" asked the woman.

"Of course there will. Love's always up to date. But, mind you, nothing sloppy. Everything we'll put in'll have Zip."

"How splendid!" said the woman. "You aren't one of the sleepy ones."

"You bet," said Bulmer, "we'll startle 'em. Look at these covers. We want a cover that'll get off a book-stall and give you a black eye."

"That orange one'd do it," said the woman.

"It might, but it's the same colour as 'Answers.' And the green one's no good, it's 'Tit-Bits.' We don't want to be taken for 'Tit-Bits,'" he added in a tone of violent contempt.

"That strawberry's pretty," said the woman.

"That's no good. Same colour as 'Pearson's Weekly' and 'Modern Society.' Besides, that pink'll fade in the sun. It's got no Zip. I want—oh, I don't know!" He was not looking at her. His eyes fixed in space, Bulmer was dreaming of a colour that would outshine gold and make crimson pallid. "It's no good," he said miserably, as he fell from the dream into reality. "The people who made colours didn't understand Zip."

"Cheer up," said the woman, "I'm sure you'll find what you want. What about egg yellow? Or if you want to startle 'em why not have spots?"

"Spots!" said Bulmer rapturously. "A green cover with pink spots! That's the idea. No, that

wouldn't do; they'd say the paper had broken out into a rash. But—you're right. It isn't colour that matters, but how you use it. Look! Look!" and, excitedly seizing her by the wrist, he drew her to the table. Upon a plain blue sheet, he drew under the word "Zip" an enormous black pod, then drew back, holding it up.

"It's lovely," he murmured. "They can't miss it." He turned on her gratefully. "I say, that was a good idea of yours."

"I didn't think of it," said the woman. "I just said spots. It was you thought of it."

"Never mind. It's a splendid idea. You see it, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! you couldn't miss that."

"Of course one couldn't. You understand." He looked at her softly. It was exquisite to be so understood. Then he talked abundantly. He told her how much capital he had, how much the issue would cost, how he was going to make it up. "It's going to be a howling success," he said. "Of course you may say we shan't get it on the stalls, but that doesn't matter. I'm going to let small boys have it for the first month at a penny—that's what it costs me—and sell it at threepence outside the railway stations. It's a pity we can't afford a poster. We can't afford anything, but I'll sell it. I'm no juggins, I'm going to plant it on all the societies round about here, and I'm getting hold of people in the choirs, and the office boys at my place are going to have a go with it outside the chop-houses and the A.B.C.'s in the City during the lunch hour. Might print a special lot for that. What about

a heading: "Take Zip with your lunch. It makes it go down!" No, that wouldn't do; they'd only say: "Take Zip with your lunch, it makes it come up." No, we mustn't spoil it, must we? by adding anything."

"No," said the woman, "of course you mustn't."

"Ah, you understand what I mean," said Bulmer. "What's your name?"

"Miss Elsted."

"Oh, I don't mean that name! What's your other name?"

The upholsteress looked at him through her black eyelashes, and said, "You're getting on, aren't you? Still, I don't mind. My name's Vi."

"Vi," he said, "short for Violet, I suppose." Then his eyes left hers, and for a moment he stood rapturous before the vision of the broad blue cover with the enormous black spot. Vi looked at him with a slow smile of understanding, and went to the sofa, where she knelt, loosely fitting the cretonne into place by means of pins, of which a little hedge stuck out from her mouth. When Eleanor came in, a few minutes later, this being her duty from time to time when there was a stranger in the house, she sniffed loudly, for she hated the litter of papers on the table. As for Richard, he did not look at her, so she went away. Had he not been so absorbed, she might have found fault in the companionship. Also, there was something very respectable in the hedge of pins that protruded from Vi's lips.

After supper that night, though, she thought it right to mention the matter to her mother, and a slight quarrel thus arose between her and Henrietta.

"You see love-making everywhere," said Henrietta tartly.

"So do you," said Eleanor.

"I'm afraid it is everywhere," said Mrs. Bulmer. "Still, of course, Richard would never commit himself with a girl like that."

Meanwhile Bulmer and Hawes, locked up in the bedroom, considered Bulmer's bed, almost entirely covered with scraps of paper. Hawes sat at the washhand-stand, converted into a writing-table.

"Notes of the week to start," said Hawes.

"Not a bit of it. Call them 'Snippets.'"

" Where are you going to get your snippets from ? "

" From the papers. Here's one of them," and Bulmer held out a cutting from " The Daily News," stating that a Crimean veteran had died in the workhouse. " You just look up in the encyclopædia how many men went to the Crimea and how many were in the Mutiny. And then look up a few more wars . . . and there you are."

" Oh ! ' Fighting Men Past and Present.' Right-o," said Hawes. " And let's have something to tickle the girls with. What about Rosherville Gardens compared with the Crystal Palace."

" That's the ticket. You dig out Vauxhall while I look up the C volume and find out about Cremorne."

They went on enthusiastically, searching the week's newspapers for anecdotes, noting dates of the opening of theatres, cutting out from the law cases the figures quoted by the parties in a dressmaker's action ; on this they based an article called " What Women Spend on Clothes." A sort of hysteria seized them. An ecstatic realization of the enormous abundance of facts, of the passionate interest of facts. At half-past ten Mrs. Bulmer knocked at the door, then violently rattled the handle when she found it locked.

" What do you mean by locking your door ? "

" Well, why shouldn't I lock my door ? " asked Bulmer.

" There's no need to lock your door," said Mrs. Bulmer, who discerned in this a wilful insult. " And what are you doing, you two ? "

Bulmer grinned. " Zip, mother, Zip. Hawes and I are going to fill you with Zip."

" Never heard of such nonsense in my life. Wasting your time, both of you, when you might be doing something useful. How do you expect to get on if you don't make yourselves useful to your employer ? If you were to learn book-keeping, or German, I shouldn't say. You're wasting your time, and you'll lose your money, and don't say I didn't tell you so. How much longer are you going to be ? "

" All night," said the fervent Bulmer.

It took them some time to get rid of Mrs. Bulmer, who went at last, slamming the door, intoning as she went

downstairs a diminishing song : " Perfectly ridiculous. Never heard of such nonsense," but they locked the door again, more notes were made, and a column as advanced as Miss Murrow's was set up. And it was decided to offer a monthly prize of five pounds for a short story which Hawes was to write, though of course he wouldn't get the prize. And they decided to find another poet : Brill was hopeless.

" Good God ! " said Bulmer, " what does the fellow think he's doing ? Listen to this rot :

> " As a robin in the winter time
> My heart . . . "

Oh, he makes me sick. You know the sort of thing we want, Alf, something about holding hands on Brighton Pier. But never mind, we'll find one. After all, we can do without a poet in the first issue. There's no Zip in poetry. Not really. Oh, Alf, I do wish the thing was out. We *are* going to have a time."

" Ah," said Hawes, " we're bound to sell the first lot."

" How's that ? " asked Bulmer.

" One always sells the first issue. It's the second that doesn't go. When they've stopped being curious."

" We'll make 'em curious. We'll give 'em Zip. Alf, if we sell that five thousand, I'm going to print ten thousand next time."

" Seems a lot."

" Not a bit of it. That's only the beginning. We're going to sell fifty thousand a month, a hundred thousand a month, and then, old boy, you'll see the advertisements rolling in."

They re-discussed the format, discarded and re-adopted the cover, quarrelled as to whether there should be two columns to a page or three. They even began the serial. It started magnificently with a millionaire being found scalped in Park Lane, while, next day, a tramp was found in a similar condition near East India Dock.

" That'll raise their hair," said the facetious Hawes.

But they prudently decided to solve the mystery before printing the first instalment. They talked loudly in the brilliant winter night, more and more excited, more and more hopeful, and every moment more secure in their successful youth. The twelve

sheets were ill-filled, for they were novices, and did not know that publications are never what one hopes. They were thrilled and anxious before those blank sheets, upon which they were to inscribe themselves.

At last, a little before dawn, when the avaricious night was yielding in the eastern horizon to a green pallor, Bulmer threw up the sash and looked away across the rising houses of Swiss Cottage, filled his lungs with the cold air. He smiled in slight hostility and said:

"We'll give 'em Zip. They don't know what they're in for. They don't understand." For a moment he thought of the dark, heavy face of the one woman who so far understood. "She's no fool," he thought. "Fine pair of eyes." Then again he grinned at the lightening sky, and murmured: "We'll give 'em Zip."

CHAPTER V

A KISS

THERE was Zip now in every moment of Bulmer's life—Zip, indeed, except in the circulation of "Zip." Hawes was right: the first number succeeded, and even made a clear profit of twenty-one pounds, allowance being made for unsold returns. The second number, though better supported, for the first had brought in a few advertisements, showed a drop in circulation of nearly a thousand copies and a deficit of two pounds. The young editors nearly dissolved their partnership because Hawes said:

"What's the matter is the paper's too tame. They want smut. Let's start a series "Gay Nights By The Gaiety."

"Don't talk rot," said Bulmer. "You know quite well that sort of paper sells a bit, but it never gets on."

"Yes, it does. There's always a demand for hot stuff."

"Well, you'd better go and start one yourself," said Bulmer. "What circulation do you think we'd get out of smut? Twenty thousand? thirty thousand? I don't say they don't want smut. Of course they do. But they daren't buy it. Too damned respectable. Too much afraid that some one will see them with it in the Underground."

"Well, call it 'The Bible News,' and then you can put in what you like," said Hawes.

The wrangle lasted for a long time, and was stopped only by Mrs. Bulmer, who banged the wall at intervals and asked how much longer this was going on. In the end Bulmer managed to make Hawes understand that if one wanted a large circulation (and what was the good of life without a large circulation?) one wasn't likely to get it except out of the home, and family, and dogs,

and gardens, and how to make a chest of drawers out of egg boxes. Living in those early days of popular magazines he had enough instinct to learn the lessons of " Answers," and " Tit-Bits." A personal revelation told him that mankind did not really care for politics, but for politicians ; nor about religion, but about comic curates. With rapturous certainty he realized that most human beings hated their work, and that by natural reaction they loved the pleasures accessible to them : home carpentry, the rosebush, tasty, cheap dishes. Sometimes when he walked north of Regent's Park, towards Highgate, he looked at the rows of villas that were just running up, and told himself that all those houses were alike, all those gardens alike ; thus they must be let to people whose tastes were all alike. If one could discover that taste one would be able to sell the same newspaper all along the row, just as one sold the same quality of tea. And, sometimes, standing upon Primrose Hill and watching London that brooded in her misty hollow, he rejoiced as he thought of those millions of people all alike, desirous of unity. It was an excited, half-sacred feeling. As if he and " Zip " had, as a mission, to unite them.

And he was right, for the third number made a small profit. In the fourth he invested all his profits ; he sold it by means of sandwichmen, who also exhibited boards. This beat the circulation of the first number but earned a net profit of only nine pounds. It was on the Saturday that he realized with sudden certainty that " Zip " was going to float. He had come back at half past six, exhausted, less by labour than by excitement. When he came into the dining-room he found Vi re-lining the curtains, and at once an aching desire invaded him to tell her what was happening. But, as if some suspicion were in them, Mrs. Bulmer and Henrietta sat at the dining-room table ; his mother was removing with benzene stains from one of his waistcoats, while Hettie absently turned the leaves of " The Family Friend." He stared at them angrily, but they took no notice of him. Nor did Vi even look up. On her hands and knees, she went on fitting the lining to the warm damask. For some time he looked at her, half-held by the fine curves of her figure and the dark neck shadowed

with black down. He moved about the room, opening books, sitting down to read and getting up again. He nearly lit a cigarette until he remembered that this was disapproved of; he was suffering intolerable pangs: he wanted to talk of his own affairs and could not.

At last he thought: "This place is choking me," and left the house, unconscious that behind this thought lay the knowledge that Vi would have done her work in a few minutes and would come out. He stood for a moment at the corner of Portsdown Road. He was not hiding, exactly, but the pillar box stood between him and the house. He found no excitement in this adventure, nor shame in hiding and deceiving—Bulmer seldom harboured more than one idea at a time, and that idea was always very strong. Now he knew that he wanted to talk to Vi about "Zip," that he would wait until she came out. Five minutes. Or an hour. And it might rain. It might rain potatoes for all he cared . . . but he was going to talk to Vi about "Zip."

He did not have to wait long. A dark figure outlined itself on the holystoned steps, and, on passing the gate, turned to the right. Bulmer did not hesitate. Confident that speed would save discovery, he ran back along Carlton Vale and, catching the girl up at the corner of Cambridge Road, seized her by the arm and said: "I say, I want to talk to you."

She had not started, though no understanding existed between them. It was part of her calm acceptance of things that she should say nothing. It was obvious to her that the young man wanted to make love to her. She reflected that she didn't mind. His fairness, his slight, supple frame, appealed to her dark slowness. So while Bulmer for a moment forgot her, she walked on with him, a little moved and flattered, and wondered in what way he would declare himself.

"Have you read 'Zip'?"

As she opened her mouth to say "No," her femininity warned her that it was safe to lie, for he would tell her enough about it to save her exposure. So she said: "Yes, it's fine."

"Oh, I'm so glad you think so," said Bulmer. She smiled, attracted by the light in his eyes.

"It's going to be a success," said Bulmer. "A

howling success." He went over the contents of the first four numbers, breaking off into enthusiastic demands that she should laugh at this joke, or be amused by the persistence of Hawes digging out of time tables record railway runs. As they went down Walterton Road and across the Canal Bridge to Westbourne Park, he talked in a more febrile tone. "Zip" was going to make thirty pounds a month, forty pounds a month. It was going to be sold everywhere. Not only in London, but in the provinces. Football! there was something in football. What about prizes for forecasts of the cup-tie results? And women! one mustn't forget women. Paper patterns! What about a paper pattern as a supplement? They stopped for a moment at Westbourne Park Station, and, solemnly, Bulmer said: "There's going to be something in it for every man, woman or child. Children! I'd forgotten children. We must have a children's corner! Tots! Tiny tots, that's it."

She was three years older than he, and she looked at him with amusement, half maternally; then, still led by her instinct, she remembered that this issue had invaded the bookstalls of the Metropolitan Railway. So she said: "Wait for me a minute," and went into the station. She came out, carrying the magazine with the electric blue cover and the great black pod.

The young man did not speak, but in his throat something moved, and a soft, warm feeling overwhelmed him. They went a few steps side by side. The spring night was very dark, and instinctively they turned to the right down a street just past a public-house, and lined with untidy gardens. They stopped. There was nobody about, and in the darkness, as she stood holding the magazine whose blue was muted into grey, he saw the gleam of her teeth as she smiled and a gentle radiance rise from her dark eyes. Without a word he put his arms round the broad shoulders, and, as she resisted not at all, drew her close. So, for a while he held her clasped, his lips locked with hers, gratefully as much as passionately. He was very happy. He was successful, and his senses were greatly stirred by the scent, half-artificial and half-animal, that rose from her dark hair.

At last she said: "Let me go. I must go."

" Where do you live ? " he asked, suddenly descending from his elevated mood.

She told him. Then again said : " Let me go. Yes, you shall see me again, if you like."

" When ? "

" This day week."

" No," cried Bulmer, urgently. He did not yet hunger for her, but already she was precious, because in a sceptical world she alone believed in him, or rather they were joined as solitary votaries of " Zip." Half smiling she said : " Friday." He begged for the next day and, at last, day by day, she instinctively refusing, and he instinctively pressing, they settled that he should meet her outside Peter Robinson's on the Monday. For Vi was employed at Liberty's, and this explained why she worked for Mrs. Bulmer always on a Saturday afternoon. She took a few private jobs.

" Now," she said, " really you must let me go." She considered him for a moment without freeing herself. He pleased her. Her slow nature rejoiced in his activity. She told herself that he had go . . . or Zip, as he put it. He was a funny boy. She realized that he must be her junior, but his caresses had quickened in her some activity. So she murmured again : " Let me go. You mustn't follow me home. It wouldn't look well." Half-shyly, she stroked his cheek, kissed him lightly, and with a soft movement freed herself and went away.

Bulmer remained for a long time standing where she had left him, staring abstractedly at the Middle Class Schools. He felt large and secure. Together with his certainty of success the caresses ran ardent through his veins. Before his eyes unrolled the pageantry of his coming victories. He laughed aloud and, swinging his stick, walked back to Carlton Vale, humming one of the ditties he had learnt from Hawes :

" Come where the booze is cheapest !
Come where the pots hold more,
Come where the boss
Is a bit of a joss,
And I don't remember no more . . . "

On the Monday morning, five minutes after arriving at the office, he went in to Mr. Blakeney and gave him a week's notice.

CHAPTER VI

THE HIGH ROAD

FOR several days, Bulmer concealed his resignation from his family. Though this subject had never been discussed, because it never occurred to anybody that he would do such a thing, and because his mother and sisters looked upon "Zip" as an irritating hobby, he had no reason to reveal his vague plans. Now, when he thought of it, which was not often, he saw that the news would probably be ill received. He felt that his family did not like "Zip." He had compelled them to read it, and watched them while they did it, like an anxious dog at the dinner table. And when Eleanor said "Very nice," and put it down on the sofa, while Mrs. Bulmer remarked that this or that was very well written, he had been grateful. He was angry with Eleanor, but still he fixed upon her eyes that were half-appealing. He did so badly want her to like "Zip." He wanted to please her, partly because it would make him proud to please her, and partly just to please her. He had questioned his mother and both his sisters, point by point, to discover whether there was anything in the paper they objected to and anything else they would like to find.

"They are the public," he thought. "If one only knew!" He had dreams in which he knew exactly what the public wanted, a monstrous sort of public with staring eyes and a great loose mouth and no brain. A dream very like the reality. He did not hate the creature with the silly eyes, for it was a large creature that could be pleased, made up of millions of grown men and women that would crow like babies if only you shook the right rattle. A creature that slobbered over its bib, and cooed with content over the results of races which it didn't bet on, and pictures of the underclothes

of actresses in another continent, and details of the weddings of royalties it had never seen. Bulmer tolerated the British public, and saw no harm in its imbecile look when confronted with a new idea, in its mean revengefulness, its keyhole curiosities, and its lickspittle snobberies. He felt that the public was like a great ape begging you to scratch it, and he was willing to scratch it; after all, perhaps the poor thing itched.

He knew that it would be a little difficult to explain that sort of thing to Mrs. Bulmer, so, for four days, he left the house at the usual time and returned in the evening, spending the day in going round bookstalls and asking indignantly why they hadn't got "Zip," and when they were going to get up to date. But, at the end of three days, he had done with most of the bookstalls, and also it had begun to rain. It was wet for the whole of the third day. And the fourth day it rained still more heavily; so, on the fifth, realizing that he could not go on spending hours in public libraries and underground stations, he decided to tell. If Bulmer had been a coward, the telling would have been more fortunate, for he would have schemed a suitable moment; but as his main desire was to avoid giving pain, he told the truth in a sentence at the worst possible moment. He did it five minutes before supper, when Mrs. Bulmer was unnecessarily interfering with Hettie in the kitchen, and walking round and round her, begging her not to drop the triangular cover of the potato dish, because it couldn't be matched. Meanwhile, Eleanor, in the bedroom, was screaming down the stairs because somebody had taken her soap.

"What . . . what do you mean, left?" asked Mrs. Bulmer, holding the soup tureen.

"I have left the office."

"Do you mean to say you've been dismissed?" asked Mrs. Bulmer, while Henrietta remained in a frozen attitude, holding high the lid of the stewpot.

"Of course I haven't got the sack. I've sacked Blakeney, Sons & Co."

"You've . . ." gasped Mrs. Bulmer. She was too surprised to be angry just then. She could understand Dick being dismissed, but the idea of his leaving of his own free will was one she could not compass. So,

forgetting him, and absorbed by this idea, she went up the kitchen stairs, carrying the soup tureen. It was only a few minutes later that silence gave place to debate.

" Perhaps," said Mrs. Bulmer, " you'll tell me why you've done this, since you didn't think it worth while consulting me."

" Oh, if I'd consulted you, you'd only have objected."

" That's a pretty reason. You know I would object to a thing, and you do it without telling me. Without telling me ! And I'd like to know what you're going to do now."

" I'm going to run ' Zip.' "

After a moment of horrible silence Eleanor said :

" The boy's cracked. Let him alone, mother."

" I shall certainly not let him alone," said Mrs. Bulmer. " I'm not sure you're not right about his being cracked, Ellie. Still, perhaps it's not too late."

" Of course it's too late," said Bulmer angrily. " I was paid my last week, and I haven't been to the office for five days."

" Oh, where have you been to then ? "

" Oh, I just messed about. I didn't want to let on at first."

" Deceiving me ! " said Mrs. Bulmer. " That ought not to surprise me, considering what you've done."

The discussion went on all through supper, interrupted by the entrance or exit of one of the girls as they went downstairs to fetch the stew, and then the apples and custard.

Henrietta did not say very much, and Bulmer suspected that she sympathised with him. But whenever Eleanor came in or went out she flung in a remark. The first was : " I suppose we shall have to keep him." The second : " That's what comes of loafing in billiard saloons." When supper was done Mrs. Bulmer expanded : She'd never heard of such a thing. She had never dreamed of such a thing. She was ashamed, yes, ashamed. It was his father coming out. Then she wept a little, and an interlude was provided because she had lost her little bag with her handkerchief in it. The scene terminated when Eleanor and Henrietta returned after washing up, for Eleanor remarked :

"I expect Mr. Hawes hasn't given up his position. Some people know which side their bread's buttered."

"Mind your own damn business," shouted Bulmer, leaping out of his chair.

"There you are, mother," said Eleanor, with acid sweetness; "now he swears at his sisters."

"I'll knock your head off, Ellie," said Bulmer," if you don't shut up."

But his anger passed, for he wanted Eleanor to approve of him; he was too excited and insecure to do without even such an ally. An immense desire to show himself reasonable invaded him.

"Look here, Ellie," he said, "for heaven's sake don't let's quarrel. I've got my way to make, and I must make it as I think best. If I fail, it's my fault. You go out giving piano lessons because you choose to. Suppose you wanted to live on your own and keep yourself, I'd having nothing to say against it."

"I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing," said Eleanor. "Not if mother wanted me at home."

"But suppose we were well off and you had your future to think of."

"I should think of my duty first," said Eleanor.

"You'll be saying it's my duty to stick at that office because mother wants me to."

"My wishes should certainly have a little weight with you, Dick," said Mrs. Bulmer, plaintively "And I'll be obliged if you won't put ideas into Ellie's head. I know it's the fashion nowadays to talk about girls leaving their home and earning their own living, and having careers, as they call it. Stuff and nonsense. Of course a man's different; he's got to get on. Girls—well, your sisters have got a good home. Of course, if they marry——"

Then they returned to the consideration of Bulmer's behaviour, and Eleanor, a little soothed by having been allowed to state her beautiful motives, grew more comforting. Eleanor was acid in her rectitude, because she was always being shocked by the atrocious behaviour of other people. She was herself entirely conscientious, wholly self-sacrificing; so long as she was awake she was willing to earn money for her family, or to work in their kitchen; she had no personal ambition, no sense

of exciting romance. But, as she was not introspective, she assumed that other people felt as she did. And when she continually discovered that they were not self-sacrificing, that they were impulsive and greedy, she grew infuriated, and reviled and persecuted them because they did not live up to the ideal character she had forced on them.

So the discussion was resumed, and everything that had been said twice was said again. During the next few days it was resumed again and again, on a diminishing strain of anger and a growing strain of fatalistic regret.

"It's no good crying over spilt milk," said Mrs. Bulmer.

"Least said soonest mended," said Eleanor.

"You can have some of the verses out of my album if you want something for 'Zip,'" said Hettie.

Bulmer did not suffer much from this domestic convulsion. He was too preoccupied with the magazine, for the advance orders for the coming issue were rather low. He was spending a good deal of money in ordering "Zip" at bookstalls, in the hope that this demand would induce them to take it in, but evidently this was not a success; in the evening he stared with hostility at the growing pile of back numbers in his bedroom. Also the small boys were not satisfactory. They lacked sense of responsibility, dropped copies in the mud, and, when remonstrated with, deserted and began to sell "The Star" or "The Sun." And two sandwichmen, intoxicated by their sales, disappeared with the proceeds.

"Alf, old boy," said Bulmer, one evening, "this won't do. We can't get thirty shillings a week out of this, and the worry's bringing my weight down as if I were doing banting. We've got to expand. We've got to advertise. Make the thing known."

"How are we going to do that without capital?" asked Hawes.

"Oh, it wouldn't need much. You can get a two inch double-column ad. in any paper for thirty shillings. Say six of those in thirty papers, three days before and three days after the issue. What about that?"

"Well, what about it? Six times thirty's a hundred

and eighty, and six times a hundred and eighty is over a thousand. Where's your fifteen hundred quid ? "

" Oh, we needn't do it now. What about making a start in a small way ? Look here, Alf, I'll sell you a half share for . . . for . . . Well, I won't do that, but what do you say to taking a debenture on the paper ? Lend me a hundred quid and I'll give you six per cent. for your money and first call on the assets of the paper."

" Show me the assets," said Alf.

" Oh, it's as safe as houses."

" Well, I haven't got a hundred quid," said Hawes. " What you want, Dick, is a mug."

" Do you know a mug ? Alf, if you can make anybody cough up five hundred quid I'll give you ten per cent. commission."

The two young men became thoughtful ; they considered the few rich men they knew. But the days went on ; the publican at Putney told Hawes that he'd lend him capital when the clouds rolled by. Uncle Hesketh was approached, and sent a letter of four pages in which he explained that journalism was already overcrowded. He added a postscript to say (quite gratuitously) that he had no influence in breweries now. They thought of approaching Mr. Blakeney, but Hawes objected. " I'm not going to be mixed up," he said.

Inspiration came to Bulmer as he was shaving, and the feeling was so revolutionary that he went over the left side of his face twice and over the right side only once. All that day he worked in an excited dream. He went up and down Kilburn High Road, staring at the place where he would achieve, but though he had chosen his time carelessly when he told the truth to Mrs. Bulmer, his faculties were more alert now that his interests were involved. At five minutes to seven, just before the shop closed, he passed jauntily among the coffins and funeral urns. Mr. Wartle immediately composed his expression of cherubic melancholy into one of aloof indifference, tempered with interest ; for it occurred to him at once that, after what had happened, Bulmer would enter his shop only on business. Perhaps Mrs. Bulmer was dead.

" May I have a word with you, Mr. Wartle, after you've closed ? " asked Bulmer detachedly.

" Certainly," said Mr. Wartle, and became busy with instructions to the men in the back shop. " Now then, how much longer are you going to be about the shutter ? Tom, don't forget to call for the brass plates as you come up to-morrow morning." Then he stroked an oak lid and remarked, as if to himself : " Fine stuff, fine stuff, best in the trade." When the men had gone he turned towards Bulmer ; his expression forgave nothing, but invited confidence. He listened to the end, and, as he listened, his rancour receded. Still, as a matter of principle, he said : " I think it's all tommy rot."

" Look here," said Bulmer ; " you're a business man, Mr. Wartle. You want to make money, same as I do. I say that if I've managed to make this thing pay without any staff, without any office and without any advertisements, a small sum, say a thousand, 'll put it on its feet and pay heaven knows what. Thirty per cent., fifty per cent. I don't know."

" I don't like the way in which you conduct papers," said Mr. Wartle, memories of the Journal regaining strength. " I think journalism should be taken as a Solemn Responsibility. The business of publication should not be undertaken lightly, for one gains over the people an Influence which ought to be Uplifting." He went on for a long time, growing less and less melancholy as he expounded the ideal publication, a touching compound of Great Thoughts by Great Thinkers. Bulmer listened cleverly to the end, then said :

" Yes, I quite agree with you. Only don't you think popular taste is rather low ? "

" I'm afraid it is," said Mr. Wartle.

" Then don't you think it's our duty to go slow ? To lead 'em upwards, you know. By starting on their level, only starting, mind you. Besides," he added negligently, " on thirty thousand copies, with a good advertising manager, we ought to make about four or five hundred a year net. Say fifty per cent., say forty, to be on the safe side."

After a long pause Mr. Wartle said : " After all, it would be enough if it was elevating in parts, wouldn't it, Mr. Bulmer ? Look here, you and I didn't always

get on. But I say : let bygones be bygones. Mind you, that doesn't mean that I say ditto to everything you do, but you come along with me to a friend of mine. His name's Mr. Cole. He's in the printing line, and he's got his head screwed on the right way. *Festina lente*, Mr. Bulmer, you know what that means, you being a classical scholar."

Mr. Cole was a small printer established near Baker Street Station, a furtive little man with small eyes, and a mind insidious as a gimlet. He raised difficulties for an hour and a half, looking at them sideways, as if this made his vision more piercing.

Nothing was done the first evening: for three days Bulmer lived in agony and for the first time knew insomnia. On the fourth day Mr. Cole wrote that he'd have nothing to do with his wild-cat scheme. On the fifth Mr. Wartle intimated that there were still hopes. On the ninth negotiations were resumed. They broke down several times, first because Bulmer wanted a salary of two pound ten a week, which Mr. Cole said was more than the past profits ; when this had been compromised for forty-five shillings a week, trouble arose over paper.

" I can get you your paper pretty cheap," said Mr. Cole.

" No you don't," said Bulmer, " I buy it myself."

" Quite impossible," said Mr. Cole. " Quite against trade practice."

" Very likely. I suppose it's also trade practice to charge me ten or fifteen per cent. overhead costs on that paper."

" Naturally," said Mr. Cole, with a broad gesture. He was beaten in the end, for Mr. Wartle realized at once that the commission on paper would come out of his share of profits. So Mr. Cole compromised by undertaking to deliver the paper at cost, reserving his right to combine the paper order with his own orders, so as to get a rebate on quantity.

Then Mr. Cole demanded the right to insert advertisements of his own ; they compromised by giving him a half page with a thirty shilling rebate on schedule price.

Bulmer and Mr. Wartle shook hands outside Baker

Street station. Bulmer thought: "No damned mind improvement in 'Zip,'" and said aloud: "Mr. Wartle, we'll be a force." Then, promptly, he walked away towards the west. "Zip" was a weekly, a real weekly, no wretched monthly now. Three months' printing credit at Mr. Cole's . . . five hundred quidlets from old Wartle to shove the paper, to give it Zip! He smiled at the light night sky. "By Jove!" he thought, "we'll give 'em Zip." And an immense desire to shout aloud in Marylebone Road filled him. He would have liked, like the newspaper sellers, to stand at the street corner and shout: "'Zip'! one penny. Extra special 'Zip.'" But he couldn't do it. He hadn't even a copy to sell. He wished Hawes were with him, but Hawes had long left the City, and would not be at home. He'd be on the razzle Up West. He wondered how they'd take it at home. Five hundred pounds! that'd make mother sit up and Ellie shut up. He looked about him, indecisive. He realized that his family would not enjoy the news as they should. They'd tell him that it was a lot of money, and he'd have to be careful, and other discouraging things. He felt alone and rather miserable, in spite of his delight. He told himself that all men are alone in the world, just bits of scattered crowd. Sometimes, if one was lucky, one came up against another bit. And then the two bits joined up, and then everything was all right. He struggled for a moment with this mangled form of romantic idealism, then remembered: somebody understood him, somebody cared. Vi, why hadn't he thought of her? He had not seen her for several weeks. He'd taken her out a few times; they had been to the Metropolitan and other music halls. And on a Sunday afternoon he had sculled with her from Hampton Court to Sunbury. They had had tea at the "Flowerpot," and he had kissed her very often on the way to Sunbury station. Then forgotten all about her.

"I've been too busy," he thought. Now he wanted her intensely. She would know, she would understand. So, impatiently, he ran to the Underground and chafed in the smoky, smutty atmosphere until he reached Royal Oak and ran on to Cornwall Road.

She came down to see him in the passage. All

through their dialogue, Bulmer was conscious of the landlady, whose footsteps down the kitchen stairs numbered only five or six. They must be very short kitchen stairs. Vi was at first rather cold, because, when called down, she had not understood it was a man wanted her. So she was still wearing her oldest bodice.

" What do you want me to come out with you for ?" she asked ungraciously.

" Please, please," said Bulmer, " I can't tell you here," and jerked his head towards the kitchen stairs.

" Is it raining ? " asked Vi, still sulky.

" No, hurry up."

They walked along Cornwall Road, he telling her in one breathless sentence what had happened. As he spoke, as the soft spring night loosened by its sweetness the hard crust of her disturbance, Vi was moved by the young man's excitement, by the rapidity of his words. Under a lamp-post she smiled at him. He said : " Vi, aren't you pleased ? "

" I think you're splendid," she replied. He looked at her for an instant, rejoicing in her blunt, dark features, in the sleepy eyes and the dark mouth, whose dewy fragrance he remembered. Then he took her face between his hands and said : " I knew you'd be pleased. You care. You do care, don't you ? . . . and you care for me a bit ? "

" You know I do," said Vi, quite honestly, and told herself with superficial emotion that he was a nice boy.

" Then," he said impulsively, " I can't let you go. I love you, Vi. Marry me, say you'll marry me."

She let him draw her closer, and did not at once reply. Her mind worked evenly enough. She was good-tempered, with a touch of sullenness. She badly wanted to do what she liked, to go to the shops, and have bus rides in the afternoon. She wanted things, many things, new buckles, and money for chocolate. She was tired of upholstering, tired of work and being ordered about. She thought : " He'll get on." And, also, now he was kissing her bent neck and playing with her hair. She liked the touch of him, his urgency, his nimbleness.

" I don't mind," she said slowly.

He went home very late, his mind feverish. He was

going to be the editor of a weekly ; he was going to marry the woman who understood him. And things were so exciting. There was going to be a motor-car race between Paris and Rouen. He'd have to have something about that in " Zip." What a wonderful world it was ! And about his lips still clung the half-scented, half-animal flavour of the kisses.

CHAPTER VII

SCISSORS AND PASTE

RICHARD BULMER sat back in the editorial arm-chair, of which one leg was rather loose. "Zip" had just gone to press and, with a comfortable fatalistic sense that what was done was done, Bulmer surveyed his office and his life, almost synonyms. He liked his little office, the first floor of a decrepit house in Featherstone Buildings. In addition to shelves from which flowed broken books and dirty newspapers, the small room held three articles of furniture: the editorial table of stained deal, the editorial chair, and a caller's chair. Bulmer had bought the office furniture second-hand for three pounds ten. For one moment he had thought of dignity and of mahogany bookcases to house the encyclopædia. Then he realized that his capital would not allow him to live up to this; so, instead, he practised extreme austerity, which was also effective. Intending to miss no advantage through this, he erected a large blackboard opposite his desk, and on it caused to be painted:

WE DON'T GO IN FOR SHOW,
WE GO IN FOR
ZIP.

That would make callers sit up. Indeed, as he went on, he developed a growing taste for boards; they became means of self-expression. One of them read:

"ZIP" WANTS NEWS
NOT CHESTNUTS.

And another:

SAY IT IN FIVE MINUTES;
YOU AREN'T SHAKESPEARE.

Yes, it was a bright, businesslike little room. Bulmer did not mind its being ill-lit owing to the enormous sign bearing the word " Zip " ; this partly filled the window. He had another sign at the corner of the buildings, urging the public to buy " Zip " for a penny a week ; this privilege he had obtained in exchange for a quarter-page advertisement from the cheap jeweller who owned the corner house.

Yes, there was some kick in him yet, though after eight weeks they were still making a loss. He pondered over the week's loss : it humiliated him. It was all very well saying that one had to work one's way up . . . but, thought Bulmer, why should he have to work his way up like other people ? He weakened a little as he thought of and vaguely craved support. He was like a god without worshippers, august but a little lonely. Of course nothing could be expected from his mother and sisters. No, that wasn't fair ; Hettie was all right. Bulmer's marriage had completed the estrangement begun by his shameful desertion of his safe job. Eleanor had made a violent attempt to prevent the marriage ; she had raved about *mésalliance* and asked him whether he wasn't ashamed of himself to marry a vulgar working-woman. Brutally told that she was paid a shilling an hour to teach kids how to imitate on the piano the cries of a cat that has colic, she attempted to move him by representing how hard this match would be on his family ; how they couldn't receive Vi ; how people would wonder why they didn't ; how it would get about. And hadn't he any natural feelings ? Thereupon, Bulmer grew emotional, and thus inflamed mentioned the word love. This word infuriated Eleanor, who had reached the age when love is looked upon as one of the minor indecencies of life.

" How can you talk such nonsense ? Love ! The nonsense that's talked about love makes me ill. Love's all very well, but there's duty first. Besides, it doesn't last."

" Ellie, you talk of love as if it was an umbrella."

" Don't be silly. Oh, I know what you're going to say. I've heard all about love pangs and looking at the moon, and all that, and all that talk about broken hearts. But what of it if people do get broken hearts ?

That's life. It isn't even as if the girl could be educated and taught to behave."

"You wouldn't object if she had five thousand a year," said Bulmer suddenly.

"I think you're very vulgar," said Eleanor.

Bulmer saw that and regretted his reply. But the conversation went on and achieved no result. He knew that Eleanor was telling the truth; love had never come to her, and if it had she would have forgone it if she thought it right to do so. She was as hard as a crystal, and as pure. One couldn't like her, but one must respect her. She thought always cleanly, and always she thought wrong. She loved freedom, and yet rose up against individuality; she believed in discretion, and pried into everybody's business; she believed in doing good to her fellows, and for that good would grind them under any tyranny.

So Eleanor never visited Featherstone Buildings, and between her and Mrs. Bulmer there arose a convention that Dick should not be mentioned. He was the shame of the family. But though they said nothing about him, they suffered from their own silence, for they wanted to discuss him all the time. As for Hettie, now thirty-three, and beginning to realize that Verdens and Cockings would not come again, she adopted her brother and his wife, as if some obscure and repressed maternal strain through them found an outlet. Without telling her mother, she helped to hang the curtains, lay the carpets, and stain the floors. Sometimes, in the afternoon, she would tell Mrs. Bulmer that she was going for a walk to Queen's Park, but once round the corner she would catch the bus and engage in long conversation with Vi. She liked to bring presents, small, absurd things—Goss china, or, in a silver frame, a picture of Ellen Terry or Henry Irving. Sometimes, unobtrusively, she would leave on the window sill half a pound of caramels, or Bulmer would find among his papers a box of Three Castles. Hettie was happy with them; she was past the simpering stage, and now seemed quiet and effaced. With the young couple she grew more human. And one afternoon, to the accompaniment of a decayed guitar, she sang "Queen of the May."

Vi was glad of Hettie's society, Miss Bulmer being a real lady, and she felt extraordinarily promoted by her marriage with a man who'd been to school up to seventeen. Also she needed friends of her own sex. The girls from the shop, some of whom she still knew, seemed unsuitable. Their conversation was not seemly, and though she would gladly have, as in the past, exchanged endless whispers regarding " what 'e said to me and what I said to 'im," broken by shocked " not reelies," she was conscious of her new dignity and of the fact that she had all her h's. The other reason was that Bulmer, having no staff, employed Vi on scissors and paste.

Scissors and paste! Vi began with enthusiasm, searching the day's papers and cutting out endless facts, the cost of new churches, reminiscences of the Jubilee, strange facts as to long-lived cats, but in a few weeks this became dull and unrewarding. She began it to please Dick, for she discovered in matrimony a certain happiness, a satisfaction half of the senses, because she had been virtuous, and half of the mind, because she still was vain. But to search newspapers, to rush down to the Guildhall Library to find out something, to sit in dingy old police courts waiting for human interest while they brought up dull thieves, bred in her a growing irritation. Vi, living in two rooms on the second floor, had not enough to do, and so she resented having to do anything. What she wanted in marriage she obtained only in part. She honestly wanted her young husband; his energetic touch, the unexpected passionate caresses which he thrust upon her, were always stimulating to the slow brooding of her temperament. But she had imagined another life, a beautiful life made of gazing into the windows of Bourne and Hollingsworth, of lying in bed reading " a nice novel," and of eating ices when you liked. So scissors and paste, clicky and sticky, maddened her. As if seeking revenge she came down to work in the morning, at first with untidy hair, later with an ill-washed face.

Bulmer hardly noticed. He was not unhappy. He had wanted Vi, partly in a physical gush of emotion, partly because her flattery responded to his need for praise, partly because one had to have a woman about. And so, when he thought of her he caressed her, petted

her, bullied her, insulted her, and much more often forgot all about her. They seldom quarrelled; sometimes, when "Zip" had gone to press, and they went across to the Holborn Music Hall, Bulmer in a blue suit that fitted well his slim figure, and Vi in a bodice with a high neck, a constricted waist and enormous *gigot* sleeves, they laughed and were happy like children. Also most of the turns gave Bulmer ideas for "Zip." and, before the show was done, his programme was crowded with notes. For note-taking was becoming in Bulmer a passion. He joyfully realized that everything was interesting. As he put it once: "Life is copy." Even his wedding was copy: they were married in church, though Bulmer had for some years emancipated himself from the thrall of church going. Mr. Wartle, being a rationalist, suggested a registry office, but Bulmer was not interested: he felt that religion was not copy. As they were married in Vi's parish, he came in touch with a new curate and was impressed by his beautiful intonation. This resulted in an interview in the vestry, and later in an article (unpaid) by the curate on "How the Clergy are Taught Elocution." Later it produced an interesting correspondence started by Mr. Wartle on "How the Clergy are Not Taught Elocution." Also the curate contributed various other articles on strange weddings he had known, and the comic side of sermons. As he was a popular cleric, a good many copies of "Zip" were sold in his parish.

Yet the paper was not going very well, for every week yielded a loss of anything between twelve and twenty-five pounds. It was not that the paper could not pay its way; it could, for it gave its chance contributors very little, and its circulation was slowly increasing; but the more the circulation went up the more Bulmer spent on advertisements, small spaces in the daily papers, placards carefully distributed on the hoardings. So the circulation went up, and the expenses went up, and the revenue stayed where it was, until at last Mr. Cole rebelled. This produced a decisive interview in Featherstone Buildings.

"Look here," said Bulmer, "am I the editor or you?"

"I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the

loss we're making, and about my bill for printing and paper. We're spending too much."

Bulmer looked at him sideways for a moment, and they measured each other, both looking sideways; then Bulmer conceived a terrific bluff, and said:

"By the way, I've had the paper costed by a printer. You're damn dear, Mr. Cole."

"What do you mean?" spluttered Mr. Cole.

"Oh, nothing. Only I find there's a printer who'll take on the paper for one pound eight a thousand less than you do."

"Never heard such insolence," shouted Mr. Cole, losing his wisdom. "You talk as if you could do as you like. Don't forget that you owe me about two fifty pounds. Besides," he grew hot because he knew that Bulmer was right, and that his price was excessive, "I don't believe a word of it."

"Ha, ha," said Bulmer sardonically.

"Not a word of it. I'm printing your paper at a loss. If you want to prove it, give me the name of your printer."

"Ah!" said Bulmer, leaning forward with twinkling eyes. "Wouldn't you like to know! Wouldn't you like to have the paper printed by him on sub-contract and charge "Zip" your ordinary price, scooping the difference!"

Mr. Cole paused for a moment, very red, and said:

"I don't want to bandy words with you. If you don't pay up in a week or two, I'll bankrupt you."

"Bankrupt me," said Bulmer. "Dear Mr. Cole, do bankrupt me. You won't get your money back out of the goodwill of 'Zip.' It isn't worth twopence. Oh, do bankrupt me; this furniture'll fetch two pounds ten: that won't help you much. Come on, Mr. Cole, there's nothing to be done. I've laid this egg, you must let me sit on it."

Finally Mr. Cole departed, routed, and realizing that the only way to get his money back was to put more in. Bulmer found the incident delightful, and also discovered a new weapon against Mr. Wartle as well as Mr. Cole: so long as they could get their money back, there was a chance that they would sell him up, but if he only spent enough to keep the property hovering

round bankruptcy, yet with a rising circulation, they would follow success as Ulysses followed Ithaca. He soon had to use this weapon again in a ferocious interview with Mr. Wartle, whose valuable outside cover advertisement he sold to a condensed milk merchant; he relegated the funeral furnishings to an ignoble position. Mr. Wartle came down angry, and was so completely crushed by threats of immediate bankruptcy, that Bulmer counter-attacked and pointed out that he could no longer be editor, publisher, and advertising manager, and that unless his salary was immediately raised to three pounds, and unless Alf Hawes could be brought in as assistant-editor, he would break up.

"Break up," said Bulmer tragically. "It won't break me, Mr. Wartle—I've got no financial bones to break. But it'll break you and Mr. Cole. Now, then, yes or no; it'll only cost you a hundred a year or so."

Mr. Wartle, terrified, agreed, and then again for several weeks "Zip" struggled. Every time Mr. Wartle saw a placard recommending this blood-sucking paper he shuddered. And Mrs. Wartle, who, of course, had been against the investment, every night, in bed, reminded him that she'd told him so.

Then one day success happened. Bulmer and Hawes were going over "The Daily News," where they found an account of a peculiarly atrocious series of murders by a man called Machen. Machen had been arrested the night before, and was charged with having murdered his wife and three children by slow poisoning. He had escaped for a long time because, being a chemist in Muswell Hill, and fairly expert, he had used an organic compound refractory to reagents, and had been subtle enough to vary its use in such a way as to kill his wife and first child, giving their deaths the appearance of blood-poisoning, while the second child ostensibly died of heart failure. If he had not bungled by overdosing the youngest child, as a result of which a certain quantity of unassimilated drug was found in the body, he would never have been detected.

"He's a cute 'un," said Hawes. "My! he could do us some popular chemistry for 'Zip' if we could get hold of him."

"Get hold of him!" cried Bulmer, and fell into the

meditative state which overcame him at times of inspiration. "Get hold of him! I wonder if we could?"

"No go," said Hawes. "No good going round to Scotland Yard and tipping the sergeant. Besides, he's at Wormwood Scrubs."

"Alf," said Bulmer, "you're wrong. One can get hold of him. One can get hold of the Grand Lama of Tibet if one likes. It's only a matter of finding out how."

"Well, what's your little game?" asked Hawes.

Bulmer did not reply, but, sitting down, handled the difficulty in his customary way, by putting down at random every idea that came into his head and then eliminating the worthless. An hour later he got up and put on his hat.

"Where are you off to?" asked Hawes, looking up from an outspread collection of "Whitakers."

"Oh, I'm off to see Machen!"

"What!" shouted Hawes, jumping up, but Bulmer was gone, and it was not until the article appeared in "Zip" that Bulmer told him the story.

It was quite simple. Obviously, at this early stage, Machen could not yet have briefed a barrister. Bulmer went round the corner into Red Lion Street, engaged a solicitor on behalf of Machen, paid him thirty pounds down as an advance on costs. On the way to Wormwood Scrubs the solicitor picked up a young barrister who had just been called, and who accepted the brief for the sake of the advertisement. The three presented themselves at Wormwood Scrubs, produced their cards. After some hesitation, they were allowed access to the criminal, because Machen, when asked whether these people were in charge of his defence, reflected that as nobody was, and he had no money, well, they might as well be.

So the next issue of "Zip" detonated like a shell.

"Old cock," said Bulmer, "we've got to put our shirt on this." And "Zip" did put its shirt on it. On the eve of the issue eighty pounds' worth of space was taken in the newspapers. Mr. Cole was bullied into printing thirty thousand posters and paying the bill-posting company. And the centre of London was invaded by strings of sandwichmen carrying this board:

MY LIFE,
By Will Machen
See To-day's "ZIP."

Mr. Cole fortunately understood what this meant, and he also put his shirt on it. They were right. The circulation leapt up from eighteen thousand to a hundred and seven thousand. Almost at once commercial firms began to offer advertisements, while Bulmer no longer waited outside the advertising office, but went straight in and booked half-pages. The issue following the Machen case carried seventy pounds' worth of advertisements, and the next one rather over a hundred pounds. For Machen was not a wasting asset, and "Zip" came to deserve the insulting reference made in a rival publication, who called it "The Machen News." For, following on Machen's story, came a series of articles on drugs and poisons, their history and effects; there were columns of opinions on poisons by doctors, chemists, divines, retired colonels, and professors of dancing. There was even an opinion from the manager of a tobacco company, which was inserted only after he promised to give an advertisement. Then "Zip" went on to poison fiends and the underworld of London.

"Well, Alf," said Bulmer, "we've done it. Now we've only got to go on."

And they did go on; fortunately crime was abundant that year. Now "Zip" stood every week as the friend of the misunderstood burglar, or of the forger who had seen better days. Their greatest scoop was a parson charged with racing frauds.

"Almost too good to be true," said Bulmer. "Religion and horses!"

Then Vi told her husband that she was about to have a child. He was genuinely glad and kissed her affectionately. Then he said:

"That reminds me; we ought to have something called 'Our Babies' Corner.' I say, you'll have to learn a bit about babies now. While you're looking it up you might write us a few pars for the paper. Alf'll lick 'em into shape."

CHAPTER VIII

HAMPSTEAD

IF Bulmer had been analytical, he would have seen that Vi had not enough to do. But he did not analyse: he registered, and while he would have noted a fact in a woman's life, he could not note a void. Occasionally he noticed that Vi's brooding, which in the beginning took the shape of an agreeably sensual sullenness, had turned into sulky silence, broken by occasional fits of bad temper. When the child was born, and a few hours later died, he was unhappy. Not that he loved in advance this unknown baby, or felt pride in fatherhood, nor even that he mourned because Vi wept; the death of his baby appeared to him a sort of failure; a creature born of him should have had more vitality. And there had been such a lot of fuss for nothing, the special feeding for his wife, and the expense of the nurse and doctor. He felt that, after all that, the least Nature could do was to let him have the baby.

Vi was very unhappy, because, feeling idle, she had looked forward to the baby. It was going to be a doll. Sometimes in her dreams it was a boy; it grew up, and played cricket, and fought other boys, and won, and went to the university, and wore a tail coat and a top hat; then it took her out to tea at Mrs. Robertson's, in Bond Street, where the swells went. Or it was a girl, and it wore stiff starched white frocks, sticking out like the skirts of a ballet dancer; and of course it had fair hair and wore a blue sash. (Being dark, she admired fair people.) And her daughter grew up and didn't go to any of those rowdy boarding-schools she'd heard of; she stayed at home and learnt French from a governess, and married a baronet. So, when the baby died, she cried at intervals for two days, and her husband tried

to comfort her by telling her she'd have another baby. He didn't understand that it would not be the same baby, and that she would want a new set of dreams. And when once more Vi went about, still she found no substitute for real occupation. There was hardly anything to do in the two rooms at Featherstone Buildings. What there was to do, namely, a little dusting, she only half-did. For she hated housework, and her husband had other things to think of: when his desk was dusty he blew. Moreover, the coming of Hawes and the development of "Zip" into a weekly, with two clerks, had stolen from her the once hateful thrall of scissors and paste. She had absolutely nothing to do except look into shops when she could not buy. So it occurred to her that if only she had more money she could shop. And Vi passionately wanted to shop, to buy stays, remnants, shop-soiled boots, bangles, packets of hairpins, anything, just to buy something. It was this new mood caused her suddenly to attack her husband, and point out to him that he wasn't getting enough money. Bulmer listened with interest, for the idea had not struck him. When the "Zip" boom came, the boom had been its own reward. He had spent his time in a fury of creation, had joyfully expended his energy giving himself to the thing he was making in an exaltation almost spiritual. He was abased before the shrine of "Zip"; he was ready to decorate it with rare flowers, rich scents, and candlesticks of gold. His soul exhaled itself. "Zip" was august and beautiful, for every week its circulation was going up.

So, at first he took Vi's remarks as in rather bad taste. He looked at her dark face as if he disliked her, as if she had said something unseemly.

"We'll see about that when the paper's doing really well," he grumbled.

Vi argued for a long time, pointing out that he was wearing himself to a shred for Wartle and Cole. Why shouldn't they be comfortable? Why should those two get all the profits? He remained uninterested, but at last Vi fluked on an argument. She said:

"It's all very well, but if you don't make more, we'll never have any money behind us."

"Oh, we'll get along somehow."

" What about when we're old ? What about it if you want to start a paper of your own ? "

Bulmer lurched forward in his chair, staring at her, and for a moment saw her no more. Those chance words liberated within him the spirit of the unborn which insists upon living. He had a sudden vision of his own paper, without irritating partners. And another paper. And another. In swimming dizziness he visioned a world where every town would take in one of his papers, something of himself. And with immense benevolence he aspired to this power. He would give them radiant papers, full of humour to make them laugh when they were unhappy, to teach them if they were ignorant, to array them for the things he thought vigorous and right. It was ecstatic : the world was his ; he might give himself to the world.

He shook free from the dream and, saying, " I'll see about it," left the room. That same evening, having sent a peremptory message to Mr. Wartle to meet him at Mr. Cole's office, he presented an ultimatum in a single sentence :

" You give me a half-share in ' Zip,' a full half-share in the capital, mind you, or I give you my week's notice now."

There was very little argument. The older men had, for some months, lost their suspicions of Bulmer's methods. They no longer doubted the young man. They still grudged the money he ruthlessly spent in advertisements ; at bottom they would rather have " Zip " jog along, making a thousand a year, than prancing and raging, making a thousand a year all the same, but making it in such an explosive way. They would rather have made a little less than take money from an organization whose floor they could feel quiver. They put up a vague resistance. Mr. Cole said :

" Preposterous ! "

Mr. Wartle said they could get somebody else. Bulmer replied :

" I give you the evening to think it over. That'll give you time to find another man. Take it on yourself, Wartle. Give 'em great thinkers at a penny a week. And, mind you, I want a reply to-morrow morning first post, so don't forget they clear the pillar at twelve."

The letter of surrender did not surprise him ; nor was he very pleased. He was now sure of six hundred a year. Well, that was all right. Now let him get on with the job. In the course of this getting on, he moved. Not that he had any ambition to attain the genteel life, but Featherstone Buildings was becoming too small. He had acquired the attic as a store-room, and persuaded the dealer in artificial limbs, who occupied the ground floor and basement, to vacate his premises ; this cost him several free advertisements. Now he wanted the living rooms too. He decided they must live somewhere, and so, quite suddenly, Vi attained one of her dreams, as if by the side wind of a magician's wand : she was given a new villa in Laburnum Gardens, on the southern edge of Hampstead, so new that all the doors stuck, and that the box in the front garden was only a foot high. A hurried afternoon, and the hire-purchase system, produced a dining-room suite of fumed oak, to which the salesman added sporting prints and a little Venetian glass for the overmantel. They had imitation Sheraton for the drawing-room, and a wonderful bathroom, hot and cold. She was very happy ; she had a bedroom with cerise curtains, and a lovely settee. Vi said that when you sank down on it you felt you were going to heaven. She thought it most unrefined when Bulmer told her that heaven wasn't in that direction. Then she had a servant : it was lovely. She used to lean over the stairs sometimes to watch her maid polish the linoleum in the hall. Vi was not keeping watch over her servant, but she enjoyed seeing her work. And sometimes she held up her finger-nails, which now she polished. They were getting long and rosy, the finger-nails of her new class.

Bulmer was less fortunate, for his household gave him no special pleasure. It was the right kind of dormitory for a man of his position. Indeed, it was a vague nuisance, because it was a long way from the office ; it meant only living, while Featherstone Buildings meant Life. He was only beginning to be touched by the joy of buying, which he was later to know. Beyond some prints after Cecil Aldin, some hideous reproductions of Rowlandson, and reproductions of Dr. Syntax's tour, he bought few pictures. Emotionally he was seduced

by a carved Indian brass bowl, or an elephant's tusk turned into a paper-knife. But, in the main, he tried to save money, for Vi's remarks had germinated in his mind : now he wanted money avariciously, as a vague symbol of power.

Bradley had something to do with this fructification. He met the man one night on the Embankment, along which he was pacing for no particular reason except that it was an unfamiliar place. He fell over Bradley's feet in the dark. In reply to his apology the man said to him in an unexpectedly cultivated voice :

" Don't apologize, my dear chap. As dear old Milton says, more or less : " With head, hands, wings or feet pursue your way."

Bulmer looked at him with interest. He didn't read Milton himself, but still, everybody'd heard of Milton. This was damned interesting. So he said :

" Milton, eh ? You sound like an educated man."

" I am," said the man lazily. " It's almost a commonplace to tell you that I went to Cambridge. Nearly all the sandwichmen in London have been to Cambridge ; it's a Cambridge tradition. And all the tramps on the Embankment too."

Bulmer looked at him, rather excited. This was a real case. And no kid about it, either. One only had to see this long shape, with the good, dissipated features and the insolent mouth in the half-grizzled beard.

" How did you come to this ? " asked Bulmer, sitting down by his side.

The man smiled. " I shall have to make a charge for this," he said.

" All right," said Bulmer, taking out half a sovereign ; " tell me your story."

"Oh, it's pretty short. I drank. I still do when I can afford it. I gambled. And I still do when I can find some one who doesn't understand the game. I went in for women. And I still do, when I meet a poor thing to whom I can tell the tale.

Bulmer felt that this was not satisfactory copy, and by degrees extracted the story. Bradley, when an orphan at Cambridge, had spent his capital before he came down. He had been helped several times by his family. Then cast off.

"They sent me to the colonies," he said, "but I came back. Better an hour in the shade of the Cecil than a cycle of Cathay."

"What did you do?"

"Oh, anything or anybody. Sold matches, newspapers, boot-laces, ran after cabs and their luggage when I felt fit, opened carriage doors outside the theatres, or stood outside pubs and sang songs."

"Look here," said Bulmer, "do you want to make five pounds?"

The man smiled. "So long as you don't offer me a respectable living, I'm on."

"Well, write me three articles on the story of your life, and go gently about the women. Talk a lot about your excesses. That'll tickle up my readers' imagination. But don't say what you did, because then they'd feel they ought to be shocked. And, by the way, just stick in something about the poor girl whom you lured away from home in your first article, and work her in as a lost ideal in the next two articles. Then end up the last one with something about the pure dreams of youth and a better world. Or I'll lick it up for you if you can't do it."

Bradley proved an excellent speculation, except that his career had to be clipped in parts. Indeed, he proved so moving that the first article brought eight pounds from charitable persons, and the second one an envelope about which Bradley affected vanity and coyness.

"She wants to reform me," he whispered. "Says she's forty-one, ahem! . . . thirty-one, and her husband, who was a brewer, died some years ago. Well, well, if she still runs the brewery we might be friends."

Bulmer forgot all about him when the articles were done. His public had had enough underworld, and he was now running a series on "Smart Society seen from the Pantry." Besides, he was excited by current events, for he was one of the first members of the Automobile Club, and joined, through a friend, in the motor car procession from London to Brighton. And he suddenly realized his ambition to own his own paper by forming "The Talebearer," a monthly all-story magazine, for which Hawes and his assistant, Annan, were struggling to obtain love stories which would be

vicious in environment and pure in spirit. " The Tale-bearer " was his own, but it disappointed him, though at once it went fairly well. At bottom Bulmer disliked fiction ; he thought life too interesting and varied to make it worth while to bother about stories. He preferred his new weekly " Snappy Bits," which was " Zip " in another form, in that it was less informative and dealt mainly in jokes, personalia, and gossip on the edge of libel. " Snappy Bits," in that feverish year had much to do with the advancement of the cycle boom, and one of the supplements, a paper pattern of bloomers, brought in an unexpected feminine public, as if the revolutionary nineties had been waiting for some insurgent lead.

But at the time Bulmer felt understaffed and overworked. In spite of the insatiable greed of the public for statements of facts compressed into paragraphs, and made obvious to the board-school standard, he saw that there must be a limit to novelty, and he did not yet understand that the public believes nothing, understands nothing, probably likes nothing ; that it swallows its publications as it does chlorodyne for the stomach ache, in its wish to relieve that terrible pain, a mind inactive as a starfish.

In those days he violently sought novelty, and this produced an irritable habit. He left the editing to Hawes and Annan. He himself was out all day, trying to buy cheap paper, to capture advertisement contracts, or standing in the middle of the traffic in Piccadilly Circus, hunting the idea that must be found every week and cast as a straw to be whirled away into the intellectual drains of the people. It was this habit procured the dismissal of Hawes. One week Bulmer let " Zip " go to press without seeing the final proofs. When the wet issue reached him, rage invaded him, his blood rushed into his ears till they sang. He rushed into the back room and roared :

" How dare you produce such a paper ? What the devil do you think you're playing at ? Didn't I tell you to get a feature article on the Lumière show of that new thing, the Kinema ? What the devil do you mean by dropping it out ? "

" I couldn't find anybody to——"

"What the hell's that got to do with it? Why didn't you write it yourself? Now you've dropped it out, and I'll bet anything somebody'll get in before us. Suppose you thought you'd do it next week. Well, I'll tell you this: 'Zip' isn't going to be a re-hash of other people's leavings."

Hawes grew conscious of Annan, and felt that he must assert himself.

"Look here," he said, "I won't be spoken to like this."

"No, you won't," shouted Bulmer, "not after next week. You can take your notice as from to-day."

He left the room, and, a little later, when he was cool, a certain sorrow fell over him. He had known Hawes for nine years in the City and Up West. And poor old Alf had helped him, not only in the first numbers, but even as far back as the days of the silly Journal of that silly society in Kilburn. He felt inclined to apologize, to give Alf another chance, but an imperious instinct struggled within him; it was no use blinking at it: Hawes had gone stale. He'd noticed it before. Two weeks running, in "Snappy Bits," they'd had a joke introducing traffic blocks in Piccadilly. And he'd harped on bloomers. He was repeating himself. Then again he thought of his old friend, and, in a sort of despair, held out an arm to the Griffin in Temple Bar. He said aloud:

"But what am I to do? What am I to DO?"

Hawes went, sulkily refusing the apology, and, impetuously, Bulmer substituted Bradley. The tramp had now turned into an impressive personage, for he wore a cheap blue suit, that fitted admirably his long, negligent body. And, clean-shaven, he seemed less than his forty-two years. He looked rakish, man-about-towny, and he developed a sparkling cynicism.

"That fellow," said Bulmer to himself, "is 'Snappy Bits' come to life."

But already Bulmer's thoughts were expanding, growing uncontrollable, and, towards the end of the year, when Jameson and his raiders were defeated by Kruger, he observed the general ineffectiveness of "The Daily News" and "The Daily Chronicle." He hated their leaders filled with solemn reprobation: "Slabs

of wet print," he snarled. " Who the hell wants to read about the iniquity of commercial buccaneers ? and the rights of small States ? Small States be damned ! What the public wants is a half col. on how Kruger stole Joe Chamberlain's top hat . . . or something spicy about Salisbury's glass of port, and what he said after he'd got it down. By God, I'll show 'em, one of these days ! There's too many Tories about, especially now that blasted ' Daily Mail's ' come along. That's the paper. They know how to dish it up. And all we've got is ' The Daily News ' singing songs of Exeter Hall, and ' The Daily Chronicle ' writing about the cabinet crisis in Ruritania, and ' The Morning Leader ' all mourning and no leading. I'll give 'em Liberalism before I've done. Liberalism and Empire. Liberalism and beer ; I'll show 'em that it wasn't to the tune of the harmonium that Englishmen spanked the Pope and poleaxed a King."

CHAPTER IX

LINING UP

THE short, nervous figure stepped jauntily along the Pinner road. The June sunshine hung softly about him, and the dazzle of the white road that rose and fell in the heat encouraged his meditations. He went quickly, revengefully, careless of the sweat which, from time to time, he wiped from his brow. His thoughts wandered, for everything disturbed him, the flowers in the hedges, the names of which he did not know and which suggested to him a series of articles called "Rambles for Londoners"; he observed an occasional insect, a beetle or a butterfly, material created by a kindly Providence so that paragraphs on nature study might interest the children and encourage fathers to buy. The sun was hot: he remembered some talk of storing it for industrial uses. Fine thing, science; that electrical supplement had been no end of a success. And still the sun struck down upon the white road, and stray poppies imprisoned its rays within the scarlet fragility of their petals; in a pond, a fat, white lily sat complacent, baring her lusciousness to the rays, fleshy, icily humid, receiving, aloof and ungrateful, the fire into her breast, exquisitive of curve and without devotion.

Bulmer stopped. He could not think very well as he walked. He had to sit in a close place that limited his view, because as soon as he had seen all that there was to see he lost interest in it, and his mind, released, entered his personal field. So he sat down in a field and stared into a blackberry bush. He thought:

"I'm unhappy."

Thirty-one! For a moment, forgetting the great excitement promised by the morrow, he abandoned himself to the intense pessimism which poets have

disguised under the name of youthful fervour. Just then he was like David Copperfield condemned to an eternity of blacking. The last four years had been active, struggling years. Things happened. Mrs. Bulmer died without entirely forgiving him. She just had time to see him move to Hampstead, and to realize that he was making six or seven hundred a year, but she did not have time to credit his increasing fortune. Therefore, she did not have time to forgive him. She called once, with some solemnity and much condescension, and tried to forgive Vi. She would rather not have forgiven Vi, but, having secretly one evening gone to Laburnum Road to see what sort of house her son lived in, and caught a glimpse of the cerise curtains in the bedroom, she was unable to overcome her desire to see the inside too. To do this she must accept, if not forgive, Vi. So Mrs. Bulmer accepted Vi and opened the doors of the fumed oak sideboard to make sure that the back was oak and not deal.

She accepted Vi; she accepted "Zip"; a little of the shame bred by her son's desertion of his safe job disappeared with time. But she retained to the end a sense of impending catastrophe. "It's all very well," she often said to Eleanor, "but you never know how these things end." And, though she remained cold to Richard, she loved him more in her fear for him. She was determined to save what he might have cost her, and began to tie up small sums in screws of paper, here a sovereign, and there four and elevenpence. These she hid behind the wainscoting and in unfrequented places under the linoleum. Sometimes she visited her hoards, and told herself that they might come in useful for Dick; how these things ended one never knew.

When she died Bulmer felt more resentment than pain. He missed her because she was a familiar fact, and he ached as he reflected that she had never wholly loved him; she had done her duty to him. And he never found out about the little hoards, because, after her death, Eleanor and Hettie ceased to spring-clean. Ultimately, the contents of the house were sold and taken away, with the secret evidences of maternal love, by the Army and Navy Stores.

He felt very lonely as he stared into the blackberry

bush and remembered this. She had not loved him, not really. Eleanor had—well, been a sister to him; and Hettie, yes, she was fond of him in a soppy way. For a moment he thought of Vi, an unaccustomed preoccupation. Perhaps she'd loved him in her brooding, physical way, but she didn't really understand; he'd been wrong there, she didn't care, not really. If only she had enough money to ride about in hansoms instead of buses . . . well, that's all she thinks about. And for a moment his mind floated away into an ideal region where lived something abstract, sedative and intoxicating, hardly a thing, rather a spirit. He might love and be loved. He thought he had seen the spirit, now and then, in the eyes of girls he met in the street. He spoke to one of them once and tried to tell her, but she replied, " Chase me." The bitterness of his youth mingled with this misty idealism. The fact of his marriage did not trouble him, for he aspired to a union incorporeal. But what was the good of talking? he thought. The world was what it was. The only thing was to go ahead, give the public what it wanted. A little emotion filled him as he thought of himself giving the public what it wanted. As if he crammed toys into the eager hands of a child and rejoiced in its smile.

Beyond a doubt he was giving the public what it wanted, and it was paying him well. " Zip " was now an established property, and his half share was worth two thousand a year, while " Snappy Bits," his own, that one, was worth three thousand a year, and rising. There was " Splits " too, a comic, which was fighting, so far with uncertain success, against the dominating " Comic Cuts." He reflected that Bradley was making a success of " Splits," but Bulmer had to watch him. Annan having been dismissed when emptied of his originality, Bradley's ironic mind was a little above the heads of the " Splits " public. Bulmer reflected that it was easy to get over the heads of that public; it seemed to keep its head where most people kept their feet.

" I rather wish I'd had old Hawes back," he thought aloud. Indeed, the Hawes vision of humour, his public-house wit, his Cockney tang, his affection for jokes touching on bookmakers, lodgers, twins and cheese, would have been the making of " Splits." But Bulmer

rejected the temptation. No, it was no good. He'd told Hawes so. His old friend had come to him some months before, in an old, tightly-buttoned frock-coat that revealed the clean but frayed linen of a best shirt. Poor old Alf! His boots were all out of shape, and he walked as if their creases hurt him .

"Sorry, Alf," said Bulmer, "can't take you back; it's no go."

"I don't expect you to make me editor," said Hawes humbly. "I know I'm not much good. Take me on as odd man; I can scratch up a paragraph and do jobs for one of your subs."

Bulmer did not reply for some time. He was very sorry for Hawes, and sentimentality insisted that he should not desert his old friend. To see him like this brought tears near his eyes. But he fought his own emotion and said:

"No, Alf, I'm sorry. You've failed before. If it was only me I'd take you back, but it's for the sake of the papers. It wouldn't be fair on the papers. They've got to have the very best, the very freshest. If anyone's a success, I've got to get him in because it's good for the papers. If he fails, it's not fair to load them up with him. Nobody that leaves us can ever come back, because he's a bit of the past, and papers don't have a past. They haven't even got a future. People think it's the sun makes the day; it isn't: it's the morning paper." He paused, inflamed by his own enthusiasm, then again noticed those incredible boots. He added:

"But I can't let you go like that, Alf. I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll write you a cheque for two hundred and fifty. Go out to the colonies. Perhaps you'll make good." He laughed. "Go to Canada. Get on. Get into their Parliament, and then . . . ah! then I'll interview you and photograph you. Make yourself first . . . and I'll make more of you. No use whispering in this world. Shout, man, shout! and if your voice can get to me across the water, by God, my papers will be megaphones to carry it to the stars."

He did not tell Hawes what was in his mind when he spoke of his papers. He had as a principle: "Never speak unless you see advantage in revealing a fact, or unless the mass of your conversation conceals the

fact you wish to hide." This Sunday was the day. For five years he had suffered while Alfred Harmsworth rose on "The Daily Mail," inflated as a balloon by the hot breath of popularity. He had watched "The Daily Mail" rise, full of hatred and of admiration, seen it do exactly what should be done, and seen it led by another man. At first, at night, he talked to Vi of his intentions, until he stopped, angry and humiliated, as her breathing grew more regular and she went to sleep. Then he found furious disappointment in his own organs; what was the good of those wretched bits of weekly patchwork? "Zip," "Splits," and the rest? What was the good of "The Talebearer," its detective stories and its tales of pure love? What did it matter if Miss Acton did come out of a South African printing firm to create "Jackie's Own Journal," and later "Mollie's Own Journal"? What did it matter if they all advertised each other? making a criss-cross of publicity, entangling men for "Snappy Bits" through their little daughter's paper, and wives for "The Talebearer" through the influence of their husbands' favourite "Splits"? What did it matter if he was saving nearly five thousand a year, living like a little middle-class man in Hampstead? What did it matter if in twenty years he were worth a hundred thousand or more? Money! He laughed aloud. At bottom he despised money. Except that money was power.

It is proverbial that the great, when beheld, disappoint would-be worshippers; Bulmer thus surprised those who already glimpsed in him that compound of steadfastness and inspiration, cruelty and sympathetic understanding, generosity, egoism, aloofness and desire, that we sometimes venture to call genius. In rare fits of self-consciousness, Bulmer was inclined to bewail his insignificant appearance, his pale eyes and hair, and especially the poverty of his fair moustache. He felt entitled to the best moustache, as to the best of all things, and with childish superstition tried a number of greasy cures for hairlessness. Bulmer was wrong. He was slight, but not unimpressive; certainly too short, too thin, distinguished neither by excess of nose, nor by a chin like a shovel; but he did not value as he should have his vivacity, the activity of his glance

that ate as an acid into the resolution of an adversary, the devotion of a disciple. Yet he surprised both adversary and disciples because they expected something massive ; they sought in him the rush of the elephant, and found the supple quality of the tiger.

It was this quality had captured Vi, but also this quality led Bulmer later to elude her. At first she reproached her husband for never sitting still, for escaping too readily from her thick arms. In that sense he made her a poor lover ; he had no languor ; he shook off her thrall too swiftly, too soon tired of a pleasure, too soon desired another which she did not command. When once he tried to explain this, to himself rather than to Vi, he only succeeded in annoying her.

" What you want," she said, " is a harem."

Vi was wrong. Bulmer wanted no harem : he hardly wanted a woman at all. He never put to himself that a man had to have a woman about, so that his meals might be cooked and his boots blacked, but that was the actual rôle of woman in his life. He was faithful to Vi, because no woman tempted him, because he had given to his career, to his blind aspiration, to success for the sake of success, all his energy, all his idealism. He wanted power. Power to what end he did not know, but just power, the consciousness of it.

And now he was to have power. It had come simply, easily, through a conversation with Bradley, into whose careless ears he suddenly expended his ambition. The ex-tramp, now well-tailored, his hair close-cut, his beard scented with bay rum, given to white spats and to large Coronas, a member of a club in St. James's Street, listened to him with irony and said :

" I don't know what more you want. I don't know what you make ; you're too wily to tell me, being afraid I'll ask you for a rise, but it can't be far off ten thousand a year."

Bulmer did not reply. He did not want to contradict this : it was good that people should think he was making ten thousand a year. Nor did Bradley say anything : he knew that Bulmer did not make ten thousand a year, but he knew also that Bulmer would like him to think he did. Therefore Bulmer would not deny it, and therefore, also, he would not be able to

refuse him a rise a little later. Then he had an idea :

" I say, Bulmer," he remarked, " If you're eating your heart out, as they say in that compendium of immortal literature which you call " The Talebearer," why don't you float your damn daily and be done ? What's the use of going on like this ? you're only raising a boil on your young ambition. Since you won't take my tip and either fill yourself up with Heidsieck or break hearts (break hearts while you may), well, float your damn daily."

" What about capital ? It wants . . . well, to do it as I want to, half a million."

" Well, get half a million. What's the use of pouring out the slush we do pour out on the people of England, if you can't get half a million out of them ? "

" It isn't slush," said Bulmer, hotly. " Anyway, I read all my papers for pleasure. But never mind that. How are we going to raise half a million ? "

" Go and ask the damn capitalists. There are capitalists everywhere, going about with their tongues hanging out, looking for a chance to have a drink of somebody else's water. Why, the world's full of capitalists, and bugs, and popular magazines. There's some in my own family, capitalists, I mean, not bugs."

" Oh ! " said Bulmer, suddenly grave. " Who's that ? "

And that was how it happened. Uncle Bradley began by being cynical ; the forty year record of his nephew did not breed confidence, but the personality of Bulmer, and especially the balance sheets of his six magazines, were extremely reassuring. Uncle Bradley hesitated for a long time ; at bottom he rather wanted to make it a condition that his nephew should be given the sack. It would be safer somehow. But, in the end, Bulmer swept him away on the current of an intoxicated tirade, where he demonstrated that half England was aching for a combination of Liberalism and vulgarity.

" I don't say ' The Daily Mail ' isn't all right, I don't say ' The Daily Express ' isn't all right. They've got Zip all right, both of them. But they're Tory. Oh, I know there are no Tories, there are no Liberals among the public. They are only people who want news, and

they vote one side or the other because, damn it all, when you toss a penny it's got to come down either heads or tails. But what really matters is not the joint, it's the dishing up. Little Bethel, and the old ladies who are making trousers for the nigger boys, and the Welsh drapers who exhort their employees at the P.S.A. on Sunday and give them Canadian cheddar on Monday, and all the people who want to do good on the cheap, and all the people who keep a religion because they don't like dogs . . . millions of them all doing good and their neighbour, do you think they're getting what they want out of ' The Daily Chronicle ' and Cabinet crises in Mesopotamia ? and out of ' The Daily News ' and its touching little bits about the presentation of a ginger ale stand to the Rev. Josiah Bagasoul ? They're quite as interested as ' The Daily Mail ' public in details about the Gaiety girl and how she made the Honourable James pay up. They want to vote for Campbell-Bannerman, and be told how to get a plot of begonias out of four pennyworth of seed."

" But what about Harmsworth ? " said Uncle Bradley and the five stolid city men whom he had brought in.

" Where there's room for one there's room for two," said Bulmer. " Harmsworth has created a taste ; it's our job to give the people what he's taught the people to believe they want. Every advertisement of ' The Daily Mail ' is an advertisement of ' The Daily Gazette,' because they're teaching people to want papers. There can't be too many papers, any more than there can be too much beer. The newspaper's a habit, like beer, and they both grow on you."

So, as Bulmer gazed into the blackberry bush, he knew that the answer that would come next morning would be " Yes." " The Daily Gazette ! " His mind was fermenting with plans, preparing to snatch smart newspapermen. His mind whirled with stunts and scoops. Money did not trouble him then ; it did not matter much that he would have a thirty per cent share and be paid for all advertisements of the newspaper in his own magazines. If he had thought of it, he would have abandoned it all, so that it might swell the four hundred and twenty thousand pounds of capital guaranteed to the paper. He loved this unborn paper

as a mother a child that is to come. His fancy staggered before a picture of the future. He murmured :

" I'll show ' The Daily Mail.' They're pushing the big things like cars ; I'll push the little things like dogs. I'll push things of which there are most because there are more people to like 'em . . . gardens . . . season tickets . . . how to give a tea party like the swells for twopence a head. ' The Daily Mail's ' too refined. It's all over theatres ; I'll give 'em music halls. And plenty of Empire on the cheap, with no taxes to pay for an army and navy. I'll give 'em Little England and make it into a beano land. As for Harmsworth . . . Zip, my boy, I'll give you Zip."

PART III

THE VORTEX

"Many a mad magenta minute
Lights the lavender of life. . . ."

—SANDYS WASON

CHAPTER I

"THE DAILY GAZETTE"

THE paper was twelve days old, and already it had enemies. Made up almost to resemble "The Daily Mail," it flaunted an aggressive Liberalism and a manly bluffness which caused noses to sniff and eyebrows to rise among the brethren of Fleet Street. From the National Liberal Club came references to upstarts; from the Reform Club, as usual, nothing at all; from the Press Club, an itch to be in it; from friends of secretaries of Opposition leaders, veiled references to the weather, leading up to enquiries casual as a yawn. Many people wanted to know if suave Rosebery and Empire, or Radical John Burns, or respectable and Free Church McKenna was to be expressed in "The Daily Gazette." Bulmer was flattered by these manœuvres, but he carefully repulsed everybody. He intimated that he would run his paper as he chose.

"And," he added, "if required I will kick Liberalism where I think fit. After all, that will help it to rise in the world."

He was free. Already his proprietors were afraid that they would lose their money. Bulmer, knowing that they could not sell their shares, did all he could to maintain in their minds the feeling that they had harnessed their chariot to the tail of a comet which would shortly crash into some solid star. As he put it to Vi in bed: "First principle of business, Vi, is for the man of brains to terrify the man of money. Brains and money never pull together; in the end, when brains gets there, money commits suicide. Gets locked up in the safe, you know. Stifled."

For he was beginning to say brief, dramatic things. He was not quite thirty-two. He was incredibly

successful. But still he was only thirty-two, and so he needed to demonstrate that thirty-two is half of sixty-four and twice as smart. The dramatic instinct had heralded the first moments of "The Daily Gazette," for Bulmer had determined not to slink in by-ways; he thought Carmelite Street unobtrusive. "All right for Harmsworth," he said, "He's been at it for years. We're too new. We've got to come out like a bomb. Got to have an office in Fleet Street itself."

There was no empty building in Fleet Street. Bulmer's despondency did not last many minutes. He remarked: "I want a house in Fleet Street. There are houses in Fleet Street. Therefore I can get a house in Fleet Street." For Bulmer thought simply, and never of more than one thing at a time. Almost immediately he decided what to do: his printers were established in Shoe Lane, two doors from the corner. The obvious thing was to have the corner. This was a very old house divided up into three large offices and six small ones. Below was a shop. It all went very simply. The little offices were delighted to sell their lease for a premium of two hundred pounds or so each, and the cost of removal. Two of the big offices wanted to extend, and had been struggling for a long time to persuade each other to move. They had thus come to a deadlock, which Bulmer solved by offering to move them free of cost to a better building, and to pay the first year's rent.

The third large office proved impossible; it was the London branch of an ancient provincial newspaper which had never moved before, and did not intend to move unless the roof fell in. Bulmer held a number of agonized conferences with aged gentlemen, who clung to their office with a tight-lipped despair recalling that of an old-age pensioner whose furniture the landlord threatens to deposit into the street. The old gentlemen were frightfully disturbed by the noise that was going on above and below their office, where Bulmer was causing partitions to be torn down and other partitions to be put up, where windows were being burst into the walls, and where, judging from the sound, ceiling after ceiling were being precipitated over the old gentlemen's heads. But, with toothless obstinacy, they intimated to Bulmer that they would never, never forsake that

office. And indeed they never did ; the shop gave a little trouble until Bulmer installed a printing press over their ceiling and drove them out by vibration, but the old provincial paper stayed. It is still there. It is still living in a state of enraged bewilderment because young Americans call and insist on handing out the dope, while partly-clad flappers rush through their enquiry office and ask if this is " The Daily Gazette " matrimonial bureau. The words " Daily Gazette," in gilt letters nine feet high, obscure their timid lettering. But still they stay, " bound upon the wheel, go forth from life to life, from despair to despair," while Bulmer above, below, on the right and on the left, conveys to them something of the blatancy of a changing world.

Bulmer had enjoyed his battle with the old gentlemen, though he never understood how they came to stay. He ended by putting them down as a natural phenomena, like typhoid and black beetles, which the progress of civilization would obliterate by degrees. Besides, he had other things to think of, for he created the wind of " The Daily Gazette " and was borne onwards upon it. The enlistment of the staff was dramatic : he did not pick a single leading man from among unemployed journalists ; every one of them was stolen from another paper.

" A good man has work," said Bulmer. " No doubt there are good men padding their hoof in the Street, but how's one to find them ? The man we want is the man for whose services we've got to outbid his proprietors." That was how he stole Charles Swinbrook, his editor, from a big Scottish daily. And Gedling, as foreign sub. He hesitated a little over Ash, the news editor, for Ash came round to his house in Hampstead, in the early morning, and offered himself to him. But Ash was extraordinarily clever, and confessed calmly that he had left five papers before he was thirty, scoring every time.

" Oh," said Bulmer. " I suppose you'll leave me as soon as you've got all you can out of ' The Daily Gazette ' ? "

" I will if I get a better chance," said Ash. " Mr. Bulmer, I'm out to make money, but I guess I'll get more out of you than out of anybody. You can have

my body, that's pretty dear, and you can have my soul for nothing."

Bulmer laughed and took him on. He liked him very well, and he also had faith in his advertising manager, an American called Silas J. Hassop, a grey, quiet, elderly man, who on being approached to leave the advertising agency which he managed, arrived with four weeks' orders in hand for the front page.

"So you've got off the mark before the paper's started," said Bulmer. "You seem pretty sure of getting the job."

"Well," said the American thoughtfully, "I don't see you turning down a man that comes along with four weeks' front page in hand."

Indeed, Bulmer was delighted with them all, except with Ormesby, the literary editor, probably because he was grave and had a Napoleonic chin. Bulmer knew those chins; they were always feeble. But still, as the fellow was only going to look after books, he forgot all about it. Miss Kent, the typist, and Moss, his private secretary, completed his personal staff. He soon grew fond of Moss, for the young Jew, just down from Cambridge, at once showed incredible tact in saving his chief interviews. He was human, too, had twinkling brown eyes, and the loose mouth of the comedian. One day, when he thought himself alone, Bulmer heard him sing gently to himself:

"Tiddly um pum pum,
Tiddly um pum pum,
He did it orfully grand.
Tiddly um pum pum,
Tiddly um pum pum,
The man who conducted the band."

Bulmer raised his chin upon his hand and thought of Hawes. Poor old Hawes! He wondered what had become of him. A bartender in Canada, he supposed, or something.

"For she was one of the early birds,
And I was one of the worms. . . ."

hummed Moss. Then he noticed his chief, and, instead of looking bashful, smiled and said:

" Popular music, sir, that's what the people like. What about one of the latest songs as a supplement ? "

" Not a bad idea," said Bulmer, " but won't do for the ' Gazette.' We're solemn, you know, pillars of Empire and all that. But you talk of it to Mr. Linton. Might do for ' Zip.' "

Bulmer was rather disinteresting himself of his periodicals. He had handed them over to Linton, who was fat, amiable, middle-aged, and had passed twenty-five years in running an immense variety of magazines appealing to the fireside, the racecourse, the ring and the choir. Bradley had refused to handle the periodicals, pointing out that he'd been doing the work for four years, and that he'd never done anything for four years on end before, and was going mad. So he took charge of the publishing and became general manager. Excepting the times when he was recovering from an excess of champagne, he intimately retained Bulmer's confidence. Bulmer tried to reform him now and then, pointing out that sobriety was not a virtue but certainly a convenience.

" No good," said Bradley. " Once upon a time I used to drink like a fish ; now I get as drunk as a lord : there's a vast difference."

The success of " The Daily Gazette " was almost immediate. Bulmer had, of course, refused to join the newspaper ring, and printed six hundred thousand. In view of the future, he did not dare sell them to the newsagents cheaper than did his competitors, but he engaged an incredible number of decrepit loafers who were controlled through Bradley's organization. These he stationed in twos and threes outside every railway station, public building, or block of offices. They did not individually sell very much, but as they received the paper at cost, they made profits enough to induce them to go on . . . and their placards gave " The Daily Gazette " an intense advertisement. Indeed, in those first days Bulmer thought of nothing but advertisements. He was one of the first to flash at night upon the clouds the name of his paper ; he engaged in savage assaults on the Imperialism of " The Daily Mail " and " The Daily Express," " Not," as he put it, " that I or my public care a damn either way, but if

they slang me they advertise me." Feeling that sandwichmen were out of date, he signalized the King's birthday by a "Daily Gazette" pageant of triumphal cars, which, for a whole day, distributed "Daily Gazette" souvenirs from Finchley to Reigate, and from Richmond to Gravesend. And on the fifth of November an immense quantity of bombs were fired from the roof of his building, dropping showers of aluminium discs, each one of which entitled the finder to receive the paper next day free of cost. And the circulation, which had started at four hundred and ten thousand, dropped down for a little while, then began to rise steadily. When once more it reached four hundred thousand, Bulmer began to spray his rivals with insults. One morning it was a placard :

"WE HAVE LICKED 'THE DAILY EXPRESS."
BUY 'THE DAILY GAZETTE.'"

or :

"'MORNING POST'!
COME OUT AND FIGHT."

And he put upon the public a pressure which appealed to the sheep spirit :

"EVERYBODY'S BUYING 'THE DAILY GAZETTE.'
DO YOU WANT TO GET LEFT?"

Or again, insinuating leaflets were distributed in the street :

"'THE DAILY GAZETTE' WAS THE ONLY PAPER THAT GAVE THE STRAIGHT TIP YESTERDAY FOR THE LINCOLNSHIRE! IF YOU HAD PAID YOUR HALFPENNY YOU WOULD HAVE BACKED A WINNER AT THIRTY-THREE TO ONE! DON'T GET LEFT NEXT TIME! BUY 'THE DAILY GAZETTE' WHILE YOU CAN!

STOP PRESS!
ALL THE WINNERS!
'DAILY GAZETTE' - - - 1
THE OTHER PAPERS - - ALSO RAN."

Bulmer, much to the annoyance of Swinbrook,

forced him to open a woman's half page, which he almost entirely filled with theatrical gossip, society news on the edge of scandal. There were also acute discussions on the best ways to catch men ! and facts as to the materials which would turn. There was a spirited debate on " Does tussore clean better than shantung ? "

As for the politics, Bulmer was giving the Liberal opposition the support that the photographer's rack gives to the head of his patient. The Boer war was ending, and as obviously England would win and annex, it was no good going in for Little England.

" It's all very well," he said to Swinbrook, who had conscientious scruples and was a most conservative Liberal. " A lot of them are grizzling about the poor Boers, but when the Tories have done the job for them and got hold of the country, there isn't one of them won't be willing to make a bit out of the South African mines. Don't you make any mistake about it, Swinbrook, the public may want to hang the murderer, but it's always ready for a share in the swag."

Besides, the politics of " The Daily Gazette " were not obtrusive. Mainly they consisted in ferocious attacks on Joseph Chamberlain, who was titillated every day by cartoons and eight-line verse. The foreign correspondents were soon taught that what " The Daily Gazette " wanted was Nippy News ; so they soon gave up the habit of sending reports of sittings of the Reichstag and the Cortes, but gave full accounts of any moral scandal they could find in Berlin, of smart elopements and trials for bribery. It was all readable, bright, active, easy to understand, for it demanded no understanding. When one day Swinbrook told Bulmer that he treated his public like children, Bulmer replied :

" You think too highly of mankind, Swinbrook. Man isn't a cow. It can't chew the cud. They gulp the news down and they get indigestion. I give them their news peptonized."

There were other sides to this activity. Four days after the flotation of " The Daily Gazette," Bulmer was so tired that he walked home to clear his head. This took him past Piccadilly Circus and through Mayfair. He stopped for a moment in Upper Brook Street, and it suddenly struck him that a rising man ought to live

there. The silent breadth, the composure of the place, impressed him, and for a moment he felt small. Correspondingly, he rebounded and, staring at the house opposite, said to himself: "I'll have that house." He noted the number. Deciding it was really very late, he took a cab back to Fleet Street and slept on Swinbrook's sofa. At nine o'clock in the morning he went back to Upper Brook Street. He saw the occupier, an entirely amazed and fortunately rather impoverished dowager. After half an hour's conversation, he drove off with the bemused lady to her solicitor's. As they came out he said:

"I suppose you'll want to pack your clothes. Wouldn't take you more than three or four hours, would it?"

If he had not forgotten Upper Brook Street, he would have found Vi easier to manage. As it was, Vi heard of this promotion at two in the morning, when Bulmer shook her by the shoulder and told her to get up and pack. It took him some time to make her understand, and when she understood that he had bought the lease of a new house and its furniture, the entire contents from grand piano to matchstand, she was so overwhelmed that she wept. For she had been living a lonely life for several years, and the detonations of Bulmer's career came to her as from afar. The old physical lure that had been so strong did not now bind them together: Bulmer caressed her between editions, and, as she was idle, she found that time went slowly. She had even lost her old delight in showing her friends at Liberty's how much money she had.

"You do it on purpose," she sobbed. "You do things behind my back. It's as if I didn't count."

"Come on," said Bulmer, "get up," and helped her out of bed with a certain roughness. Vi was thirty-five, but still handsome in a brooding, animal way, and for a moment he noticed those sullen good looks. But love was to him accessory. One made love as one brought out a newspaper, as one shaved, life being one damn exciting thing after the other. Only now and then did there pass through his mind that strange feeling of aimlessness, loneliness; he had felt it most often in Vi's arms. It was not that she was remote, this heavy,

fine woman: nothing was remote to Bulmer when it was there. But, dimly, he always realized that he had not the thing he needed, because if he had it, he would not know it was there. He would not be the master of a pleasure; he would be in a state beyond desire.

So Violet wept and packed. As soon as the shops were open, telephone calls precipitated into Upper Brook Street men with heavy boots to take away decrepit furniture and bring new, to run pipes through ceilings, and fit porcelain baths. Vi lived through it in a state of agonized pride, and the confusion was increased by Bulmer, who, becoming intoxicated with his house, insisted on superintending the multitude of workmen, with the result that a large policy meeting was held in the drawing-room, while the ancient cisterns were being dragged down the stairs. And in the hall all sorts of people waited to waylay Vi, beggars in various states of decent distress, representatives of charitable societies anxious to have Mrs. Bulmer's patronage, keen-looking young men, thinking to do better here than at Fleet Street, artists with their portfolios. There was even a rather decayed colonel who had come to offer social introductions, and sat in the hall for four hours, carved out of brown wood, waxed and polished, and refusing to let the gaze of his monocled eye rest upon this crowd that was not in society.

CHAPTER II

UPPER BROOK STREET

BULMER realized clearly that life is just one damn thing after another when he had to control together "The Daily Gazette" and Upper Brook Street. Twin passions, and, unfortunately, fighting twins. He did not tell himself that he had taken on too much and taken it on too suddenly, for that sort of idea did not occur to him. All he knew was that he was harassed, received and wrote too many letters, saw too many people, and was unduly haunted by the telephone. And because he felt harassed he concluded that Vi was inefficient.

In those early, feverish days everything was a pleasure, everything was a load, because he had no sense of finality. He wanted to be the greatest newspaper proprietor in England, to smash Harmsworth, to dominate politics, to have everybody at his crushes, and yet a secret discontent told him that there stood behind all this something else, unattainable unless he could define it. It was not that he did not succeed: the circulation of "The Daily Gazette" was rising steadily, and it triumphed by cynicism. Having announced the signature of peace with the Boers the day before it actually happened, "The Daily Gazette" saved itself with magnificent effrontery by printing next morning an enormous headline:

"PEACE SIGNED!
'THE DAILY GAZETTE' TOLD YOU SO YESTERDAY!
WHO'S FIRST WITH THE NEWS NOW?"

All the superior people laughed, but London was impressed, and the circulation, which had been enhanced by this impudent affair, was almost entirely maintained.

If it had not been for Vi, Bulmer's social success might have been more dramatically swift. As soon as Upper Brook Street was ready, Bulmer instructed Vi to get a party, much as he would have told her to get a leg of mutton. It was only a week later, when he realized that nothing was happening, that he questioned Vi, and found that she could think of nobody except the people in the office and their wives. He became extraordinarily angry :

" Good God ! haven't you got any common sense ? Do you think we've taken a house in Mayfair to hold a wayzgoose ? Why don't you ask the compositors ? And ask Hettie and Ellie to bring the young men from the estate office ? Do you think we're making thousands a year to sit on a blasted island ? "

" But who am I to ask ? " said Vi, tearfully. " We don't know anybody."

" Don't know anybody," said Bulmer, contemptuously. " Of course one's got to begin to know people before one knows them. One's not born with a visiting list. Ask the whole damned directory."

" You're joking," said Vi, offended.

" Don't be silly ! If you ask everybody in Mayfair and Belgravia, three-quarters of them won't answer, and the other quarter'll come. Some of them because there'll be something to eat. Some of them because they're afraid that if they don't come " The Daily Gazette " will serve them out. Some of them because they've got nothing else to do that night and can't bear to stick at home."

In the end, however, Bulmer realized that society, like newspapers or cobbling, is best run by experts. He had two of them in hand. One was Lady Maud Redgrave, the middle-aged daughter of a marquess who had insisted on selling him stale society news at high prices. He took Lady Maud out to lunch at Claridge's, and quiet arrangements were made, following on which the society news was suppressed and heavy compensation was given. Lady Maud was very pleased, and assured Bulmer that not only would her father and mother come, but many other more or less hungry and titled relatives, and . . .

" Of course," said Lady Maud, " in these days people

are so informal. I don't say, Mr. Bulmer, that if this had happened ten years ago it would have been quite so easy. But this is 1902, you see. One must march with the times. These are the days of democracy."

Finally, Lady Maud's small visiting list and her enormous nodding acquaintance were included.

Meanwhile, Colonel Bagshot, the colonel made of polished brown wood, removed his encrusted monocle after a further sitting in Bulmer's hall. After a large number of haw-haws, and "my dear fellas," and references to the best people, he practically produced a tariff per head, without extra charge for evening dress.

"You might do somethin'," he added vaguely. "Give 'em a sorter reason to come. Buy a Rembrandt, you know, or go in for cream-coloured ponies, or somethin'."

Bulmer had no time to bother about Rembrandts or ponies. He relied only on the vanity of man. He calmly asked the whole Cabinet, the leaders of the opposition, all the embassies, and scattered careless cards over "Who's Who." Nor was he mistaken in his estimates, for, on the night, a warm June evening, there was no standing room in the house, while carriages overflowed from the side turnings from Hanover to Grosvenor Square. He was very happy, though all the time he wanted to get away to see "The Daily Gazette" through the press. He hated to let Swinbrook do what he liked with it. And he was nervous. He was afraid that the society reporters in the hall would fail to recognize some celebrity. Also, he felt rather strange, though he had got over the difficulties of introduction by shaking hands with everybody, and hoping that they would recognize him from the numerous photographs of himself which he had scattered about the house; this conveyed the strength of his conjugal affections, for everybody would conclude that they had been put there by Vi. For a moment he stood in the middle of the big drawing-room, pleased and uneasy. To his surprise, this refined party bellowed more loudly than any social. He had hired some very expensive singers, but he did not mind the waste, for he knew that music made people talk. And, anyhow, nobody could miss the Blue Hungarian band on the leads; nothing

but artillery could have stifled that. The women were splendid and at first aloof, women different from those he had known. Lady Maud was very impressive in rich yellow satin, appliqué with white silk motifs; a shy blonde in ivory silk, her bodice veiled with lace, and strapped with turquoise panne, made him feel crude. And there was a peeress of recent creation, a splendid creature in black satin veiled with a tunic of chenille. They thronged about him, coloured, scented, some haughty, many fulsome, conquered and conquering. He had not before now realized how small women could make their waists, and how dominating their busts. His eyes rested in bewilderment rather than desire on these massive shoulders and thick arms, those necks collared with pearls, that shining hair, dressed high, sometimes crowned with tiaras, sometimes with ostrich feathers. Vi was very handsome, but looked swarthy in her gown of pink and white striped moiré, with ruches of chiffon. She was more at ease than he. Having begun shyly, she realized that the damage was now done, and as she was being profusely introduced by Lady Maud and Colonel Bagshot, she realized with a dawning contempt, which is the seed of social success, that under-secretaries will fight for ices.

So the social life went on as it had begun. An extraordinarily expensive chef was bribed away from a big hotel, and the publicity given to the guests at Bulmer's dinner-parties was such that by degrees hardly anybody refused an invitation. Within a year, Vi, still clumsy, still entirely incompetent, was driving every afternoon to a variety of at-homes. Several times a week Bulmer would escape for an hour from the office to appear at some at-home, at a first night, or at the opera. He was doing this now without knowing why he did it, for he was of those who violently desire a thing until they obtain it and then desire it no more. Besides, his interests were changing; he had started "The Daily Gazette" in a Zip mood, and for a little while it looked like a weekly paper issued every day. He was still a child, for he had unlimited wonder, insatiable curiosity, but he did not wonder in the abstract, or prostrate his spirit before the singularity of man and the mystery of beauty. Always his

curiosity led him to such questions as: "Is Latin worth while?" "Do girls prefer clean-shaven men?" "Should women smoke?" The fate of the world, the significance of life, were not things that troubled him, but he was excited by the relationships between material things and material persons. It was Swinbrook deflected him, for Swinbrook, very Scotch, very obstinate, and extraordinarily reliable, looked upon politics as the duty of man. He became very familiar with Bulmer because he was constructive. He did not irritate him as did Ormesby, who was always able to explain why a thing couldn't be done; Swinbrook, in his conferences with Bulmer, was continually pressing him to cut out some of the woman's page and to take a political line.

"Well, we're Liberals," said Bulmer, exasperated.

"We're not. We're only non-Tory. Oh, I know we're independent. But one can't stay independent. It's the one thing democracy won't allow."

"Oh, we don't want to stuff the paper with indigestible stuff about education and all that."

Swinbrook won by degrees, for Bulmer could not resist taking up a cause. He did not much care which, but he realized that unless he backed something he couldn't bash something else: the exaggeration of his feelings impelled him to bash. Already he lacked coolness, and was influenced by his own paper, for having raised a scare over Irish unrest, he was thrown into a state of delighted terror by a cattle raid near Kilkenny and a little rick-burning in County Cork.

"It's revolution," he said to Swinbrook. "The country is going to be drowned in blood."

Swinbrook laughed at him, and persuaded him that in this world there never was a revolution until it happened. He found his chief difficult to control, because Bulmer scared himself with his own scares. But he liked him. Old in his trade, he enjoyed the vivacity of this young man who exuded ideas and excitements on the slightest stimulus. He liked to comfort Bulmer when four thousand miners struck in South Wales and his young chief assured him that Socialism would be established next week. He liked to restore his confidence in mankind, shattered by some corruption case. When such a case grew public, Bulmer always declared that

the commercial world was rotten to the core, and insisted on flaming articles denouncing the canker of the City. Sometimes he irritated Swinbrook, who, towards the end of the year, nearly left "The Daily Gazette." Bulmer had instructed him to take a strong line in favour of colouring margarine either deep yellow or pale pink, so as to make it impossible to pass it off as butter. Accidentally Silas Hassop saw the copy on Ormesby's desk, and, terrified, rang up Bulmer, explaining that the margarine firms would be furious, and that this would cost the "Gazette" ten or twelve thousand a year in advertisements. After a long argument, which Bulmer maintained because he hated to be opposed, he told the advertisement manager to tell Swinbrook to hold up the article. The same evening Bulmer, at a club dinner, sat next to the Under-Secretary in charge of the Bill. The politician, aware of his opportunity, turned Bulmer in favour of peculiar colours for margarine.

When, next morning, Bulmer opened his "Daily Gazette" and found no article in support of the Bill, he flung himself upon the telephone with insane fury. He got Swinbrook out of bed, only to be told that Hassop had given his message. Upon which he telephoned Hassop, and taking no notice of the unfortunate American's protests that they had the day before settled to let margarine alone, he shouted:

"How dare you say that I said the article wasn't to go in? How dare you suggest I'd be influenced in my policy by a question of advertisements?" He repeatedly interrupted Hassop, and again and again challenged him to dare to say that he had altered his orders, to dare to suggest that he, Richard Bulmer, had changed his mind, or had been wrong. Finally he slammed the receiver down and had his breakfast, greatly injured by the idiotic, literal spirit of his underlings. He felt right because he could not conceive himself in the wrong. It was not that he lacked modesty; indeed, he received the most obscure strangers and questioned them, anxious to find out all they knew of mining in Arizona, training peach trees, or living happily though married. But his modesty was "The Daily Gazette" modesty; he was modest because he wanted information as an

offering at the shrine of the newspaper god ; he wanted no guidance for himself, and, when he had this information, if anything in it affronted by prejudices, he distorted it to fit the policy of " The Daily Gazette," because the policy of the paper was its soul, and nothing repulsive could be laid before it. Then, once it was in the paper it was true, and he believed it because Bulmer was his own newspaper as soon as his newspaper appeared.

It was therefore a stormy, irregular guidance he gave the paper, but somehow it fitted the people and the times. He knew their slackness of mind and their hysteria, because his own mind was careless of detail and easily shaken. So he never tried them too far, which Swinbrook was inclined to do :

" Hang it all," said Swinbrook, " you can't write a political article that'll be understood by telegraph boys."

" Then if it can't be understood by telegraph boys," said Bulmer, " let it go, it's no use to us. But, Swinbrook, I say it can be understood. If you've got unusual ideas you must put them in such a way as to be understood by usual people. Never go ahead as fast as you might, for the public never goes quite as fast as you. You can only get ahead of public opinion by swimming up-stream : it's very tiring. And nobody will follow you, because it's too tiring."

" You don't suggest we should swim down-stream ? " sneered Swinbrook. " Like the Conservatives."

" No. Everybody wants to swim up-stream, and nobody wants to do the work. If you've got a political line, swim across the stream, a bit up rather than down. The public can just about manage that. And once every three months swim up-stream for a week, just to show 'em you can do it."

He impressed his staff by this contemptuous clarity, and soon stories began to radiate about him, Napoleonic remarks, mainly. For he began to cultivate these, and his vanity enlarged. Quite seriously he told Linton that he was the best known man in London :

" I can't go down Pall Mall," he said, " without some man jerking his head towards me and saying to his friend : ' Look, that's Bulmer. Runs " The Daily Gazette." He's the coming man.' "

His staff did not mind his boasting. For he was charming as a child that demands attention when at last it manages to ride a bicycle. Sometimes his vanity was hurt; already a member of the Automobile Club and of the Gadarene, he was blackballed at the Mausoleum. He had tried it too early; thenceforth he devoted valuable scraps of space to the august stupidity, to the lumpishness of the Mausoleum Club. He was the original author of the story which makes a member of the Mausoleum Club ring for the waiter and say to him, pointing at a fellow-member: "Charles, please take that gentleman away. He's been dead for two days."

In fact he was happy in this life akin to a bazaar. Not only were his papers rising in circulation, not only was he achieving the flattery of a number of enemies, but he discovered the joy of buying. In the early days he bought with the avidity of a magpie quantities of clothes, fancy socks and ties, expensive jewellery, things he used once and then forgot. (They were eventually stolen by his valet.) In those months he bought a cottage in Sussex and a shooting-box in Scotland. Then sold them, for at that time he never left London. He bought thousands of books which he never read, collected editions, bound in white vellum, and amazing compilations of Napoleonic and Bismarckian intrigue. When he could buy nothing else he bought a newspaper: when it was ill-edited he laughed, when it was well-edited he swore. Newspapers fed his appetite. He received newspapers from America, from every country in the world, even Japan. He could not read them all in their languages, but their strange make-up, the feel of their smudged pages, gave him a little sensual thrill. Every hour brought its excitement, and every night its joyful weariness.

CHAPTER III

POLITICS

IT was characteristic of Bulmer that he liked his staff. It was not that he doubted himself; indeed, if an employee criticized or qualified some suggestion he was half-angry, half-injured. He was angry because he was opposed, and injured because it hurt him to be deprived of approval. He never made much concession to the views of his editors, and so often he would spend half an hour in verbose restatements of his case, whirling facts, throwing out with broad indiscretion statements that were not Cabinet secrets, but which had come to him through officials in a semi-confidential garb. When he failed to convince or impose his will, he was for the rest of the day oppressed by a feeling that the man who had escaped him did not believe in him. It was very painful, for, after all, his staff were members of the public, and the public had no right to doubt him. That was perhaps why he liked Singleton, the news sub., almost as much as Swinbrook. For Singleton was completely malleable, and almost invariably replied: "Boss, you're right." Singleton honestly thought that the boss was right, but he said so more often than anybody else. He was a young man, had been a reporter on a bicycle in the Midlands, had earned an uncertain living, sometimes as a racing prophet, sometimes as a reviewer on religious weeklies. Bulmer picked him up when he was an advertisement writer, having been enchanted by a parody of Hamlet's soliloquy, which advertised a well-known brand of mustard. When he interviewed him, he discovered his experience, and said, *à la Napoleon*:

"I'll make you news editor." As if he had said: "Rise, Sir James Singleton."

Jimmy Singleton, thanks to this favour, practically

duplicated Ash, by stunts. He was valuable to Bulmer, infinitely inquisitive, entirely callous. His determination to obtain the views of widows before their husbands (killed on the railway) were quite cold aroused the admiration of Bulmer. Also he had a pleasant taste in sensation, and made "The Daily Gazette's" police news wage successful competition with those of "The Daily Telegraph." Latterly he had been specializing in divorce, because this enabled him to hold up to a shocked but delighted public the worst details and the noblest sentiments. This, perhaps, had something to do with the political development of "The Daily Gazette." One day he printed a long report of the irregularities of a Welsh Nonconformist minister.

"It's all right," said Bulmer, "I'm not blaming you. Only, you see, next time, when you've got the option between a peer and a pastor, well, bash the peer."

"All right, Boss, though of course you know there's nothing like a touch of religion to make a sex story spicy."

"Yes, I know. If it was the Church of England, I shouldn't mind so much. And if you catch a cardinal on the hop, well, keep him hopping. But let the Nonconformists alone. After all, we're a Liberal paper."

"Yes, Boss," said Singleton, "you're quite right. Though we haven't so much political news."

Bulmer said nothing, but thought a good deal about this for a few days. He did not really want political news, but it annoyed him that Singleton should say that "The Daily Gazette" didn't have a lot of everything. He talked to Ash about it a little later, saying abruptly:

"It's all very well our being political. But it compromises one."

"You mean," said Ash, "that popular feeling may turn."

"Oh, I don't care if popular feeling turns. I'll turn first. It's not that. It ties you down."

And yet, before 1902 was done, "The Daily Gazette" became excessively political. Liberalism was natural in Bulmer. The membership of a party being made up of two categories, one which supports its party because it loves it, the other, much larger, which supports its party because it hates the opposition, Bulmer was a

Liberal because, like Stendhal's hero, Sorel, he was a man conscious of low degree and of high attainments. He was attaining, and he knew that already people respected him more than any backwoods peer, but he hated the class which he was entering because he had had to enter it. He was established in the country of wealth and power, but not as a citizen born within its frontiers; he was a soldier who had conquered that country, and from time to time tested the dryness of his powder lest the natives, slavish and hostile, should rise against him.

But these were vague feelings. What actually drove Bulmer into violent Liberalism was Lord Immingham. He had only seen the famous general once, at a political lunch party. He did not like his face, the large, rather square head, the thick cheeks, the mouth which under the heavy moustache seemed contemptuous; above all he hated the cold, hard eyes, and the heavy eyelid that drooped over a gaze full of indifference. What maddened Bulmer was that the speaker who toasted Lord Immingham said a few rather aggressive things against the Government's policy, of which Immingham had been the instrument in South Africa: when the general rose to reply he made no reference whatever to those attacks. In a hoarse, tired voice he pronounced three sentences of thanks and sat down, looking at the wall as if he had forgotten that two hundred people were gathered about him.

Immingham exasperated Bulmer. For he was not impressed by people who said nothing: he concluded that they had nothing to say. And Lord Immingham stank of Toryism, of crack regiments, raised noble eyebrows. The sight of this self-assured, solid figure drove Bulmer towards the rising working-man, likely to keep a shop or run a big factory, but unlikely to take his place among the big-wigs, with their titles, and garters, and brochettes of medals. It then occurred to Bulmer that he would like a title himself. That did not prevent him feeling democratic: he was democratic for others.

Those political activities helped Bulmer at what might have been a crisis in his life. Quite suddenly, after seven years of matrimony, for a reason which seemed small but was rooted in deep causes, Vi left him. The breach seemed to arise from a mistake Vi made at

lunch. Bulmer, having discovered the smart lunch party, entertained ten carefully selected guests—a political peer and his wife, three rising capitalists and the wives they had married before they rose, a well-known lady novelist, and an A.R.A. A microcosm of English society. Now Vi figured fairly well at evening parties, partly because she had fine shoulders and arms, and partly because there excess did not matter much. At lunch she appeared in an afternoon dress against which there was nothing to say, for Vi was completely controlled by her dressmaker; but she wore nearly all her jewellery. Suddenly, in the middle of lunch, Bulmer compared her with the other women. She was wearing three bracelets, a collar of pearls, two diamond brooches and many rings. For some time he gazed with aversion at those jewelled hands, telling himself in ejaculations which nearly became audible: "Woman's mad! unteachable! Makes us the laughing-stock of the town!" At last he grew so angry that he did not look at her again until the guests were gone. Then he slammed the door and, practically running to and fro in the drawing-room, told her in a speech abundantly garnished with oaths that she looked like a publican's wife and behaved like one. That he was sick of it. And sick of her. And that she could go to hell for all he cared.

He was amazed when Vi quietly replied:

"So am I sick of it. So am I sick of you. You treat me like a bit of furniture. Might as well not be there. Yes, I'll go. May as well separate for all the good we're doing together."

Bulmer was shocked into silence. It was strange to see loose language freezing into material form. But that was not the end. With sudden shrillness, Vi, her dark cheeks red-brown, her hands on her hips, let forth all that she had suffered for seven years, by loneliness, by exile into a class which was not hers; she was too big, too angry to be pathetic; she abused him, inflamed by a sense of wrong, because he had torn her from the place to which she belonged and given her no other. He had suspended her in a new life. When she grew breathless Bulmer said:

"All right, since we're agreed it's no use arguing.

Let me know your address and I'll see you get a good allowance."

The shock hung over him as he went to "The Daily Gazette." He felt uprooted. Probably it was not true. She wouldn't go. She knew which side her bread was buttered. Still, he was afraid that she might go. It would make a scandal. And he wished she would go; her brooding sulkiness sickened him, now that he knew she felt wronged. But, above all, he was insulted because he had failed to provide her with the life she wanted, because he had misgauged her. Vi, too, was part of the public.

From time to time, in the following weeks, he felt a little ache. He did not miss her, exactly; he was too busy to miss human beings. But she had eluded him; she had not loved him or gone on loving him. And it was so hard not to be loved, not to impose oneself upon an available sentiment.

It was this, perhaps, combined with other factors, drove him into politics. He had nothing much to gain in the way of money, for he was drawing twelve thousand a year from "The Daily Gazette"; his own six publications yielded him another nine thousand; Mr. Cole and Mr. Wartle had long ago been bought out. He still desired money because money was the evidence of power. If one made money out of newspapers, it meant that people read them, people believed in them, followed them. There was no other test. So the winter was occupied by savage attacks on the Education Act put up by the Unionist Government. Bulmer left to "The Daily News" and "The Daily Chronicle" the solid case for popular control of the schools, and concentrated on the delicious exercise of vilifying the Church party. By degrees his special writers dug up every known case of clerical tyranny, whether in the schools, on the land, or in charitable institutions. He cared nothing for religious questions, but by degrees he convinced himself through "The Daily Gazette" that the cleric in the schools was something bloated and obscene, a slug with a touch of octopus. He engaged learned old men from the Rationalist Association, who quoted every day choice scraps of Haeckel and Voltaire.

"Voltaire!" he said, "that'll fetch the brainy lot."

But Bulmer did not bother much about the brainy lot: there weren't enough of them. His appeal was entirely to the mob. He was one of the first to introduce a daily cartoon into a halfpenny paper, having discovered an amazingly fecund young Canadian, who signed "Rob" and executed exactly what the boss dreamed.

"Got to get a standard Church schoolmaster. See what I mean? Something people'll recognize at sight like Mr. Pickwick. Or the sleeping beauty. I want a foxy-looking individual. See what I mean? Nosing about and getting hold of the people's money for the Church schools. That's it. You give him a fox's head and stick a shovel hat on top. And the eye: mind you, give him a sly eye. You know how to do it, sort of eye that looks backwards. As if it was afraid the police were after it. See what I mean?"

"Rob" saw what Bulmer meant, and soon the shovel-hatted fox was so popular that a toy manufacturer sold great quantities of models of "Rob's" creation outside Hyde Park when demonstrations took place against the bill.

CHAPTER IV

SISTERS AND OTHERS

BULMER did not at first feel the absence of Vi. She had lived with him so long that her departure did not break his physical habits ; she had dealt so little with the government of the house, that without her it went on much the same. For Bulmer, when taking the house, told himself that he ought to have the usual servants. As he did not know what servants to engage, and realized that Vi would not rise beyond cook, parlourmaid and housemaid, he went into a registry office in North Audley Street, the notices of which had impressed him. He was rather bewildered by the complexities, especially by names such as between-maid, under-nurse, and especially groom of the chamber. Footmen, too, were very perplexing. Servants seemed as varied as sub-editors. And he knew more about sub-editors. So he entered the office, hiding tremor under breeziness, and feeling that he was treading the dangerous maze of an intricate social system. It was very easy. The office grasped that his wife was not well enough to call. They grasped that he was a busy man. And that he was a rich man. They seemed to know him and his sort. So they charged him heavy fees, and, within a few days, Bulmer had to affect casualness as he met many strange faces on the stairs. When Vi left him, there was a housekeeper, a butler, a parlourmaid and her underling, a head-housemaid and three attendants upon her, a cook of incomprehensible nationality, but great skill, and a tribe of troglodytes, kitchen-maids, scullery-maids, who did something or other round the cook in the catacombs of the basement.

For a while everything went well, for the housekeeper understood perfectly that Mrs. Bulmer had gone away

for the sake of her health. Also she was a woman of great ferocity, with a mouth so tight that one concluded that her late husband probably used upon it a hammer and chisel in the unlikely event of his wanting to kiss her. But the housekeeper could not figure as hostess, and though Bulmer at his first dinner party asked an odd woman, he realized that a hostess of some sort must be found. It was very embarrassing. He thought of electing some impoverished titled lady. Then he realized that everybody would say that she was to him more than a hostess. He also realized that she probably would become more than a hostess. He didn't mind that, but he didn't want to have it said. A book he had glanced at, on the Regent and his period, held up the temptation of splendid and flaming irregularities. He pictured himself imposing upon London Society, crawling before "The Daily Gazette," some Spanish dancer whom they would accept because he dared to flaunt her.

Only he knew that wouldn't do in the Liberal party. In fact in any party. A political party expects one to keep a door between oneself and one's diversions, even if everybody knows that one has the key.

It was this brought him to invite Eleanor and Henrietta to keep house for him. At least, he began by inviting them, and ended by coercing them. Hettie was willing, but Eleanor clung to Carlton Vale, much as the old gentlemen clung to their office in the middle of "The Daily Gazette" building. But she had given up her piano lessons, and when Bulmer, exasperated, threatened to cut off their allowance, she surrendered, and arrived with trunks in a state that shocked the boot-boy, and a parrot in a cage which later caused much trouble because Bulmer influenced the bird to remark at frequent intervals: "Cock a doodle doo! 'Daily Gazette.'" It took several months to acclimatize the sisters to the spacious life. The banking accounts which were forced on them terrified them: such balances must be ill-gotten. The servants were too many to manage, and the housekeeper did not look as if she could be managed at all. Also they discovered the characters of the servants: the butler lived mainly on port; something was going on between the third housemaid

and the second footman, something that seemed to make them both contented with the place, and so could not be quite nice; as for the cook, she was probably abusive in her own language, but nobody knew what that was. And Bulmer was not much use: when his sisters explained, he told them with the fine disdain of details which characterizes the male householder, that the house had gone on nicely for two years, and he wished to heaven they'd let it alone.

There was a certain amount of trouble because Ellie tried to audit the weekly books, and discovered that the laundry bill alone would have run the house at Carlton Vale for a week. As for cigars, obviously the guests took them away in their pockets in handfuls.

"Oh, let the tobacco alone," roared Bulmer. "Moss'll pay that sort of bill in future. What's it matter if they do take 'em away?" Then he grew absorbed, for he was wondering whether it would be good policy to arrange for a special brand of cigar with a "Daily Gazette" band.

They settled down by degrees. Hettie, being of a malleable disposition, and having always been dented by life, fitted easily into the massive contours of the expensive life. She was forty-one, and could still dream; she very much enjoyed having money to spend in Bond Street on little bags, sachets, handkerchief cases, brushes with tortoiseshell backs. And, secretly, after hanging for a while at a corner in Regent Street, she began to buy scent. Also she indulged in benefactions, so Bulmer handed her the begging letters he received every morning. Hettie was supposed to show these to Eleanor, who belonged to the Society for the Prevention of Charity, but she often managed to hide one or two in a book and benefit the unworthy. By degrees Hettie collected committees, and soon filled in two or three afternoons a week, rather faded, rather pretty, generally clad in mauve or pale grey, in some Mayfair drawing-room, where good works were performed and notorieties achieved. People thought her sentimental, but when she was attacked Hettie replied:

"Poor people! It's not nice begging for money, is it? Who'd do it if they weren't poor?"

So Hettie interested herself in orphans, in unmarried

mothers, found homes for inebriates, and legal defence for bullied wives.

Eleanor was much more difficult. Her economical habit, notably, irritated her brother, who could not understand why Hettie so easily became overdrawn, while Ellie's balance was turning into a permanent institution.

"Oh, do go out and spend something," he said once, after meeting her in the hall carrying a brown paper parcel containing an egg-box. "What's that? An egg-box! I say, Ellie, you know you collect egg-boxes. It's like that time years ago when you sent those twelve pots of jam to Mrs. Feltham through Polly. You remember, you made Polly bring back the box."

"That was for a different reason," said Eleanor. "I didn't want Mrs. Feltham to have the trouble of posting it back."

"No, but you didn't mind Polly having the trouble of bringing it back. Let alone that it could have gone by rail."

Eleanor did not reply: she had always sent parcels through relatives, for she still lived in the illusion that postage was as expensive as in Victorian times. As for Polly, she said:

"Why shouldn't Polly have the trouble of bringing back the box? She was a relation."

Bulmer argued a little. He did not know why it irritated him that Eleanor should assume that she had the right to worry her relations. She had told him before that relations were part of oneself. Yes, she was very difficult. She was humble and aggressive, and once her support was enlisted she grew entirely unjust. Having discovered the irregularities of the butler, the housemaid and the footman, and knowing nothing against the others, she concluded that they were perfect. Eleanor was blind to their faults as well as to their qualities. She lived in a black-and-white world. When attacked, she always justified her prejudice in favour of or against a person by displaying the other side. If one went on attacking her she thought one was calling her a fool. So Eleanor made few friends; she was not naturally hostile, but people disappointed her: first she failed to understand them,

and assumed in them inhuman goodness; then she found them out. If she had been more sagacious, she would have drawn away from all her fellow-creatures. For a time it looked as if Miss Brede, who lived in the country, and had rigid views as to the lower classes, would become her friend. Together they went twice to the British Museum, and once to the Albert Hall on Sunday afternoon. But, at last, Miss Brede showed her humanity by coming up to town, going to a dance, and coming very near to getting engaged. She then attempted to get Eleanor to prove an alibi, so that her mother, who was then in town, might not know that her daughter had not come to her at once.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Eleanor. "I think you have done very wrong. You have a duty to your parents who have to support you and educate you. You don't seem to think you owe them anything."

"Well, I don't owe them everything," said Miss Brede.

"You owe them companionship," said Eleanor.

"I give them a lot, poor dears," said Miss Brede, "and as we generally quarrel I don't think they want so much more."

So Eleanor lost Miss Brede. Besides, she had never liked her way of never looking at a mirror, because, as she said, she had a snub nose. Eleanor thought it right to look at oneself in the glass if one thought oneself ugly: it prevented conceit.

So Eleanor, unable to control the household, disapproving of the surrounding waste, had very little to do, and indulged enormously in fancy work. Bulmer gained a smile from the fine cut lips when once he handed her "The Modern Priscilla," straight from America, a publication entirely devoted to fancy work. He was not so displeased with her as he thought he would be, for after a long struggle, during which Hettie wept, Eleanor was persuaded to give up her former type of evening frock, which was too low for the day and too high for the night. Experience forced her into a modern gown, where, to her brother's surprise, she exhibited delicate and palely yellowish arms and shoulders. She was forty-three, but the rigidity of her life went well with her fine eyes and her high nose. Now that her

hair was washed and waved, she was rather an impressive figure, and though she frequently abused his policy, though she detested "The Daily Gazette" and even dared in his presence to look at "The Daily Mail" (which she only did to annoy him, for she hated it as much as the "Gazette"), though she found the people who came to the house too gawky when they were poor, and too coarse when they were rich, she learned to live the new life. And the eyebrows which she raised in protest imparted to her a pleasant air of disdain.

Besides, Upper Brook Street was merely Bulmer's home, merely the place where he slept and entertained; he lived at the corner of Fleet Street in "The Daily Gazette" offices. The tenants of adjacent houses were being persuaded out, or driven out by noise, and the building was slowly extending along the frontage. "The Daily Gazette" still enshrined Bulmer's soul, and the affairs of his emotions served him as a relaxation, much as golf serves other men. He had been faithful to Vi, not out of any sense of fine discrimination, but because he was too busy to entangle himself in affairs which meant time wasted on rides in cabs, lengthy lunches, and giving women the attention the unreasonable creatures demand if they are to be kept in a good temper. But now Vi was gone. She had, inefficiently enough, represented woman, so he sought the sympathetic contact which he needed mainly in arms that were venal. He was not satisfied, but he was not quite unhappy. Woman and all she might mean to him was a secret thing. And secret things were not dominant in Bulmer. After all, if a thing was secret, it was antipathetic to publicity.

In the course of the incredibly wet summer of 1903 he began and ended an affair with a woman of title, a big, handsome, bony woman, whose cheeks came straight down from her head and formed a chin of great determination. She had very fine eyes that seldom blinked, beautiful lips the smile of which seldom varied, ropes of hair excellently waved. She was moulded into her clothes, and whether she wore an evening frock or a riding habit, everything fitted her. One could guess by looking at her that, under her clothes, every hook, eye and button was not only present, but done up; her

stay laces were so arranged that when she undid them the two ends proved exactly equal in length.

She made him happy in a way. Her intimacy flattered him, and she was intelligent enough to understand him, but she was not soft enough to sympathize with him. She gave him a relation duly dosed with passion, devoid of longing, of uncertainty, in which lay no search for the union that is impossible and that all desire. His passage in her life was like a promenade through the formal beauty of the garden of Versailles.

It did not last long. It was not exactly that she did not care for him, nor he for her, but she had given him only what he knew, and what he wanted was the unknown. When he talked to her of his plans and ambitions he was crying out to her, begging her to lift him out of the successful life, begging her to make him forget his own desires in the misty fulfilment that a woman can afford when upon a man she sheds the incredible gift of making him ready for fraud, cruelty and treachery. Instead, she asked him to take her brother into "The Daily Gazette." Bulmer saw him, thought him a fool, and refused. Then he grew clumsy, talked of starting the young man on some job; if she wanted any money he'd manage it for her. She hardly said anything, and to the end of his life he never understood how much he had outraged her. For she was a member of the English aristocracy, so she had the mind of a tout: she could accept patronage, but must refuse gold. He did not understand that she had a pride of class which made it impossible for her to take money, but made it natural for her to demand an advancement which she thought due to her class.

So Bulmer was thrown back into the casual life. The woman did not matter so much after all. He had not hesitated to sacrifice her dignified amorousness to "The Daily Gazette." Half-unconsciously, he told himself that he might have wholly loved her if he could have loved her enough to sacrifice something of the paper to her whim. Instead, "The Daily Gazette" captured him more completely. He played with it as a toy, and sometimes, for fun, he made it carry a new man or a new picture into fame. It really was fun . . . like making confetti with a filing punch. He happened to

see a play at that time, called "The Meadow"; all three acts happened in the open air. This struck him as a new thing. So he printed an enthusiastic notice of "The Meadow," and though the play was doing so badly that it was near being taken off, it immediately boomed. By next day it was booked ahead for three weeks. Bulmer grew intoxicated with "The Meadow," and followed it up by articles on open-air life by well-known actors, fashionable doctors, and nut-eaters. The boom was so big that, within three months, five theatres were staging open-air plays. And the boom rolled on, diminishing but still sturdy, into the next year, until open-air plays were replaced by a new craze: plays in which everybody wore pyjamas.

Bulmer was very busy. He went not only to first nights, but was advised in advance of the latest thing. Thus he was present when the first eight miles of electric tramways were opened by the London County Council between Westminster, Waterloo and Blackfriars. Bulmer was interested because this was the first electric tramway in London. Also, the ceremony restored his friendship with Tarland, now an electrical engineer. He was glad to recover Tarland, and also he respected him, for Tarland said that he was no writer, and refused to compose an article for "The Daily Gazette." He was the first and only man Bulmer ever met who could say such a thing.

He was very busy He was not happy. He was not unhappy. He was very busy. Mainly that.

CHAPTER V

FULL SWING

IT followed naturally on his normal state of overwork that Bulmer should easily respond to irritation. In one of those fits of unreasonable reaction, he created "The Evening Gazette," just because he had read in an obscure American publication that the public had to be battered twice a day if it was to think once. It also said that the secret of Sir Alfred Harmsworth's power had as much to do with "The Evening News" as with "The Daily Mail." Bulmer brought his fist down on the table and said to Swinbrook:

"We got to have an evening paper. And pretty damn quick."

Bulmer took no notice of his editor's apparently sound advice, when Swinbrook pointed out that "The Daily Gazette" was three years old and wanted all the money and energy Bulmer could afford if it was to become an established habit in six hundred thousand readers . . . to say nothing of the million odd at which they were aiming. But Bulmer was never afraid of lacking money. "Good men," he said, "find backers." In this case his contract to control for five years yielded him a thirty per cent. capital share, which he later increased to fifty-seven per cent. when new shares were issued, and ultimately to seventy-eight when Uncle Bradley's executors sold out. On this day of inspiration he saw, as usual, many people, the typical clients of a Liberal paper, earnest men, anxious to spiritualize England, capitalists, insinuating that free trade was excellent for all except their own industry, wronged Hindoos, young men with complete plans for the organization of the future, and old men with pitiful anecdotes of the past. Bulmer saw them, bled them

of information, gave one an order, the other a brief negative, picked up the telephone whenever it rang, and read most of the next issue in proof. But all through floated the new idea. And it floated for twenty-five days, to which was added a week's running in blank. Within those thirty-two days the premises were extended; second-hand plant was mixed with new. And "The Evening Gazette" started, or rather exploded: for Bulmer realized that the first duty of a new-comer is to be noticed. So, at great cost, he induced three popular favourites, the sporting prophet of one publication, the city editor of another, and the cartoonist of a third, to hand in their notice and pay forfeits on their contracts. Their employers let them go, realizing that if they held them they would serve them ill. It was expensive, but Bulmer felt that it was worth while, when, on the day of publication, he saw on every hoarding his new poster:

"IF YOU WANT TO READ *DEAD SNIP*,
YOU MUST READ 'THE EVENING GAZETTE.'

IF YOU WANT TO READ *MONEY BAGS*,
YOU MUST READ 'THE EVENING GAZETTE.'

IF YOU WANT A CARTOON BY *TIP*,
YOU MUST READ 'THE EVENING GAZETTE.'"

It was a thundering, dominating poster, for the retired colonels, and the clergymen with a taste for speculation, adored "Money Bags," while "Tip" dipped his pencil in vitriol and every day earned a million laughs. As for "Dead Snip," he was worth the two of them combined, for, at the time, one racing man out of every two, whether of the Cocoa Tree or White's, or whether he laid his shilling at the barber's, put his money on any horse that "Dead Snip" believed in.

In the face of his immediate success, Bulmer broke up that poster into three, and soon, round the principal towns, stuck in the meadows between Singer Cycles and Heinz's Baked Beans, appeared boards adjuring literate England, in the name either of "Money Bags," "Tip," or "Dead Snip," to buy "The Evening Gazette." Bulmer invented nearly all his posters. A few failed,

but most of them were very successful. Notably, there was a picture of Father Time clinging to the back of "The Evening Gazette" car. The old fellow had just lost his hour-glass, and, in his hopeless effort to keep up with "The Evening Gazette," was throwing away his scythe. That poster was helped by the sudden attack of opposition papers, who recalled the famous case of the peace announcement, when Bulmer had spoken a day too soon. Bulmer was very pleased.

"Good business, Swinbrook, good business," he chuckled, walking up and down the office. "They're laying into us like billy-oh! Talk of a free advertisement! Oh, if only I had a hundred thousand talkative enemies! Swinbrook, do you think you could find me a hundred men, say for five shillings a day, to stand in Piccadilly Circus and other places where there's a crowd, and shout: "Down with 'The Evening Gazette!' Down with Bulmer!" Or a demonstration! Let's have a meeting in Trafalgar Square, and let 'em bring along a crowd to wreck the office."

Swinbrook laughed, and these extremities were not resorted to. But Bulmer did better than answer his critics: he plastered every space he could find with a scarlet and yellow poster reading:

"DO YOU WANT TO-MORROW'S NEWS?
IT'S IN 'THE EVENING GAZETTE.'"

And "The Daily Gazette" was brought in to conduct ferocious controversies with its sister evening paper, so that a double advertisement was gained, because the public grew anxious to see, morning and evening, what new nasty remarks they would make about each other. The only thing that Bulmer did not do was to attack his critics.

"Catch me advertising them!" he remarked.

For Bulmer was most capable of cynical detachment. He showed it, notably, in the affair of "The Daily Gazette" tea, which that year he floated. A wild person called Tresillian, half-planter, half-chemist, had wandered into the office one afternoon and explained that in Ceylon shoots were cut too early; if one let the shoots grow one would get three pounds of tea for

every one one now got off the plant. Of course, it would be coarser, and weaker, but—and the man's yellow face showed a grin—one could, with a touch of tannic acid, bring it up not only to standard, but up to the taste of the English masses. His tea would be darker than walnut stain, and strong as ink. As for the price! say eightpence a pound, including tax. Bulmer flung himself on this proposal with intense enthusiasm. He had the tea analysed and reported on by fashionable members of Royal Society. He converted the product into what became the famous D.G.T., and invented a number of prominent posters, showing the weary miner as he refreshed himself with D.G.T., dear old ladies with their feet on a hot water bottle, sipping D.G.T. There was even a St. Bernard dog, rescuing a snow-bound traveller, and carrying a thermos flash labelled D.G.T.

This was, of course, a great success. Bulmer never failed because his taste was the average taste. He liked what the masses liked; the only difference was that he had the will to impose, and they only the weakness to accept. He was entirely honest. In this case, having had it demonstrated that D.G.T. was chemically a good tea, he believed in it: when an opposition paper began to publish horrible stories of tea-poisoning, he refused to take up the challenge.

"No, Swinbrook," he said, "let 'em alone. There isn't any tea-poisoning, and, if I start talking about it, I'll create an atmosphere, and people *will* get tea-poisoning. If I say nothing about it they won't. Don't discuss a thing, and then it doesn't happen."

"Well, I had an aunt," said Swinbrook, "who drank a couple of quarts a day. I think she died of it."

"I never met anybody who died of tea-poisoning," said Bulmer.

That settled it. If Bulmer had not seen a thing, it was not. Though he would have been quite ready to ignore poisoning if he could have conceived it. But to ignore was his one method of ending a difficulty: he suspended his enemy in an airless void. And, in due course, the enemy died. He would not deal with the enemy, and so, when feelers came to D.G.T. from rival tea firms, he merely remarked that this was a trap, and

did not answer their letters. When offers came for amalgamation, and when it was suggested that some firms were going bankrupt, and would come cheaply into a combine, he said :

" Trying to take us in by making out they're on their last legs. Another trap."

The secret of his strength was that Bulmer believed in D.G.T. As D.G.T. was praised in " The Daily Gazette," he believed in it. If he had arranged for a faked report (which he did not do) he would have believed in it once it was printed in his paper. In this case, he more than believed in D.G.T. : he drank it. Eleanor created a disturbance when she tasted the new brew, but Hettie was very kind, and said it wasn't bad if you drowned it in water. He was so pleased that he gave her half a ton of D.G.T. for the poor.

Then, one day, Bulmer forgot all about D.G.T., because he was excited by the discovery of radium. Also Tarland was inflaming him with stories of electrified plant, which was just coming in. Those were fecund years, and in the thrill of riding on the first double-decked motor-bus from Oxford Circus to Peckham, Bulmer forgot D.G.T. Tresillian called in vain : the boom collapsed in twelve hours. Still, he had a fifth share in the company, worth to him ten thousand a year. Bulmer had not made a penny. But he had enjoyed himself. And he went on enjoying himself, for, fevered by the example of " The Daily News," in four months he established new local offices with private wires and telephones : before the year was done, " The Manchester Daily Gazette," " The Glasgow Daily Gazette," and " The Birmingham Daily Gazette " every morning shouted the Bulmer gospel to a placid England.

In those days, when Bulmer was thirty-five, his condition of mind approximated with that of most men who wanted to be rich. It is a complex condition ; it shows sides which the world calls vicious, or cruel, and sides which the world finds magnificent. It is the mind of Captain Kidd and the mind of Samuel Smiles, the one swift, the other slow, the one lawless, the other crafty. Bulmer amalgamated the mind of his brothers ; he had Kidd's audacity, occasionally the prudence of

Smiles ; he could, like Pierpoint Morgan, Senior, conceive broadly ; he had the original dash of Rothschild, bringing back before the Government the news of Waterloo ; he joined the ruthlessness of Crœsus, collecting treasure from the vanquished, with the cunning of Fouquet and Warren Hastings, controlling politics for power and profit. He was of the modern breed, with a touch of Cecil Rhodes, for he wanted money mainly for the sake of power. And also he wanted to make money because it was sport : he collected money as other men collect Rembrandt etchings. Nor was this quest entirely without nobility. He had some sympathy with Sir William Lever, and often printed plans and descriptions of Port Sunlight, which were useful to the social movement of the day. He had no abstract impulse to do good, but he honestly desired good houses, good wages, security for the worker, and money in his purse to spend on pleasure. His ideal was the comfortable slave state.

He liked material good things. He attached great value to the things money buys, to food, drink, tobacco, houses, pictures, clothes, motor-cars, horses, grouse moors, boxes at the theatre, charitable benefactions, platform seats, cards for the enclosure when royalty was present ; he valued seats, seats in the House of Commons, and in the House of Lords, seats on committees, seats on Borough Councils and Boards of Guardians ; he would have liked a seat on the right hand of the Almighty, if purchasable, and, failing that, a private fauteuil in hell. He knew that he could drive only one motor-car at a time and eat only one dinner, but he was human enough to enjoy having more motor-cars than his neighbour, and giving him a better dinner than he could buy. For there was in him none of the good taste which gives dignity to the Jewish millionaire ; he could rejoice in the possession of a unique Velasquez, but he stressed the unique and tended to overlook the Velasquez. He liked charity because he liked the sensation of power that lies in giving. And he liked to head subscriptions with a thousand guineas from " The Daily Gazette." For he could enjoy even the splendour of a moral attitude ; he had splendid simplicity. He was the type of rich man doomed to grow richer by the force of this simplicity. He could draw his wealth only from

the enormous development of a single idea, and from the atrophy of every other idea. Life was good ; life was real. Sometimes he felt an emptiness : then he took a pencil and wondered whether he could not create another paper.

CHAPTER VI

AFFAIRS

BULMER was usually unaware of events in his house. So many people came there at so many times that he failed to observe them. He was like an actor-manager who ends by growing familiar with the people in the stalls on first nights, yet knows few of them. And so it did not surprise him that an entirely inept, youngish man, called Herbert Padbury, should fill rather often at lunch a space that might have been given to some one more eminent or more amusing. Padbury was either a dissipated thirty-three or a well-preserved forty-eight. Very tall, very thin, vaguely knock-kneed in excellent striped trousers, burnt brown by the open air, pocketed under the eyes by drink and late nights, he suggested greed and degradation. When the men were left together his conversation was vile and his voice delightful. He was insolent and servile. He was the sort of person that any decent policeman would kick out of his front garden if he had any daughters in the house, but whom the same policeman would call "sir" when he found him drunk and hanging to a lamp-post. Padbury was the son of a rather impoverished Irish peer; he had been withdrawn from Eton, and had taken a pass at Oxford just in time: another three months would have got him sent down. After hanging about the clubs and losing a breach of promise case against a chorus girl, he had somehow disgraced himself in a sinecure at Dublin Castle. He had gambled a bit at the clubs that liked his kind of play, touted for a motor-car firm, and then been sent in turn by an anxious family to Australia, Canada, and South Africa. He married in Canada, spending his wife's money, which was abundant, after which death released her from his company.

In his later years Padbury became less irresponsible, but more dangerous. He came back to London and extorted a small income from his brother when he succeeded to the title, and for a long time he had been outwardly respectable. He acquired Bulmer as he acquired people who might be useful, and Bulmer rather liked him ; he enjoyed Padbury's unpleasant references to people who were photographed on the back page of "The Daily Gazette," but had not yet dined at Upper Brook Street. Bulmer did not notice anything until, one Saturday afternoon, his holiday, he found him alone with Hettie, drinking tea. Then he forgot the incident. Then Hettie learned to ride, and rode so badly that she was noticed with Padbury in the Row. This was brought to Bulmer's notice through snapshots of "People Seen in the Park." His attention having been drawn to the subject several times, he at last began to realize what it might mean. He had heard of Padbury. He thought :

"Oh, well, even if he didn't settle down. Course he wouldn't. Wonder whether I want a scandal in my family? Might damage me. Might advertise me. One never knows with scandals."

So he did nothing. Padbury once made vague references to the cost of living in town, and said in general that he'd knocked about enough, and that if he could find a nice girl with, say, fifty thousand down, he'd pull along with her. "Ain't enough really," he said. "Respectability's a luxury ; eh, what ! Feller long ago said anybody could be virtuous on ten thousand a year. I dunno. May be easy to be virtuous on ten thousand a year, but it ain't necessary. If one's only got a thousand a year one's got to be respectable as a churchwarden. Other thing's too expensive."

But nothing happened. One night, as he went to bed, Bulmer heard sobs and went into Hettie's bedroom. She would say nothing, but a week later, in his society notes, Bulmer noticed the engagement of Padbury with Miss Daisy Hogstein, of Chicago. It was this, no doubt, increased the discomfort in the house. Hettie, whose affair was well known, thanks to Padbury's conversation in the clubs and his references to the old goose with the golden eggs, acted at dinner parties (with great

enjoyment) the part of the bereaved widow who is trying to make the best of a blatant world. Eleanor, who was forty-five and better looking than ever, because she was still thinner and happened to have good bones, made Bulmer feel the angles of these bones. He found her very difficult. There had been trouble already about bridge on Sunday afternoons: bridge was just then becoming very popular, and bridge parties were being given with a hint that whist had gone to Tooting. Bulmer had boomed bridge in the "Gazette," and was not going to be without his bridge parties.

"I'm not a prude," said Eleanor, "but I don't think cards ought to be played on Sundays. It doesn't look well."

"Look well to who?" asked Bulmer. "In this part of the world one's neighbours don't care."

"I'm not talking about the neighbours. Of course the neighbours wouldn't know. It isn't like tennis."

"But, good heavens!" said Bulmer, "supposing there was a tennis lawn here, would you make a fuss? Does it hurt your feelings to have games on Sundays?"

"Not at all," said Eleanor solemnly, "but it hurts other people's feelings. It shocks them. In the case of tennis, people who pass by don't like it. And if we play cards here on Sundays it wouldn't be good for the servants."

Bulmer swore, and bridge parties were given on Sundays, for in the end he always broke Eleanor. But she annoyed him by specially appearing at one of the parties and loudly informing his guests at half-past six that she was going to evening service. Also there was trouble when he caught cold: Eleanor insisted on nursing him, and then refused him hot milk and brandy because all alcohol was bad. She knew that he was an average drinker at meals, but now that he was in bed and could not get out, she found an opportunity for propaganda. So Bulmer rang the bell violently, and told his valet to bring him a bottle of whisky; he drank so much of it that he was sick. It was all this, no doubt, precipitated him into affairs with women. He was not beset by passionate preoccupations, and indeed had all his life felt very little the precise need of women. Apart from a few venal adventures, and a romantic but entirely

platonic passion for a young woman who walked on in a musical comedy, he had known little of women before his marriage. He was entirely faithful to Vi. After she left him, the emptiness of his emotional life, rather than desire, drove him to adventures which always he strove to make profound. In this he was not fortunate: he was too successful, too rich, to be entirely loved. He was thirty-five, so active, so intelligent, so domineering, that women were attracted to him, and that his difficulty was to choose rather than to discover. But the attraction was always a little unclean, for it was not Richard Bulmer they loved, but the proprietor of "The Daily Gazette," the coming rival of Lord Northcliffe; or, worse, they wanted to be advertised, or to write in his papers, or to be seen in his company and that of the powerful. Now Bulmer was not a man of fine perceptions, but he was not a fool, and so he was unhappy when he discovered always behind the melting sweetness, the ardour, the ready wit, or even the slow grace that is all aloofness and innocence, this aspiration to personal profit.

His vague idealism disarmed him; whenever a relationship with a woman developed, he secretly told himself: "At last! She loves me. Really she loves me." He retained a vague vision of the woman who would really love him. He didn't quite know what it would be like, but it would be wonderful, reposeful and stimulating. He would not want anything more than she gave him. He could trust her, she would be real.

But women did not give him that. He fascinated them; his personality crushed them, and in the very fact of conquest they escaped him because they admired him too much to love him. They took him intellectually rather than emotionally. In the end, they nearly always made him talk about himself or about his plans: they did not allow him, who so violently wanted to, to love them. They wanted him to perform, to be a great man, strutting up and down in a closed room for their entertainment, and to tell themselves that vanquished Hercules span at their feet. And the temptation was too great for his vanity. He responded, and did talk about himself and his plans. His ambitions, by expressing themselves in words, excluded the emotion

he desired. Once even, at an assignation, he talked about his intentions for an hour, put on his hat and went away, having forgotten the rest of his errand.

For a moment he thought he had found Her in Joan Belmont; only he half-cynically told himself that he had thought the same thing in the case of Miss Kingsley and Lady Barford. Indeed, Miss Kingsley had been a fine adventure. She was a rather short, square girl with too much red hair, with eyes too large and too green, a skin too white. She was a fairly successful actress, and she attracted Bulmer probably because she was sufficiently self-satisfied to think of herself rather more than of him. But Miss Kingsley was excessive. She had a mind to fit her impressive features. She was a burlesque of beauty, and their affair did not last very long. It was always vaguely ridiculous: they speechified in turns, they caressed each other to the accompaniment of stage whispers, while eyes drowned in stage tears were directed to an absent gallery. Bulmer soon grew tired of this private Drury Lane . . . but the scene of their parting was magnificent.

Lady Barford was quite different. She was a very tall woman whose husband took little notice of her because she bored him. As Barford sardonically put it: "Polly's a dear, but the trouble is she was twins. And her brother's got brains enough for two." It took Bulmer a long time to realize this, for Polly Barford was tall, had splendid dark eyes, a tragic mouth, and banded black hair. She looked like Medea, but the splendour of her features hid an entire absence of thought. Polly Barford observed nothing, understood nothing, remembered nothing. If she had been born poor, the London County Council would have sent her to a school for defectives. She did not resist Bulmer's advances: she had not even ideas about morals, and her reputation was excellent only because the average London rake was frightened off by her cool splendour. Still, she got on very well with Bulmer for several months. She listened to him, her great eyes wide open, and, whenever he paused, said in a deep voice: "You're wonderful!" Then, after a pause: "Wonderful!"

Bulmer subsisted happily on this fare until he came to demand of Lady Barford something more than to be

told he was wonderful. He wanted her to make him feel wonderful, but he could feel wonderful only if he felt sure that she loved him. Her admiration cloyed, and as he was not a man in whom physical emotion blotted out every other demand, he found his interviews with Polly grow less frequent. He grew bored, and the interviews were spaced out: she proved too lazy to make scenes about it. Once, when he had not seen her for three weeks, she gave him a beautiful smile, asked him whether he thought Russia would beat Japan, listened to the end without a sign of understanding him, and remarked that he was wonderful!

It was Joan Belmont broke off the relationship by interposing herself as a new interest. Joan Belmont was very small, very fair, and infinitely intelligent. She was perhaps too vivacious and too intellectual to give him the restfulness which he wanted after his hard labours, but, coming immediately after the immeasurable dullness of Lady Barford, she convinced Bulmer that he was in love with her, that he would ruin himself for her, be divorced for her. For the first time he thought of getting rid of Vi, whom he had not seen for two years, and of whom he heard only now and then, when she wanted more money. (For Vi, who had a large house at Finchley, had developed a taste for motoring and was rather expensive.) Joan was a painter, living in an upper flat in a decrepit house in Lawrence Street, where she practised exquisite Bohemianism with the assistance of Chelsea. She came to know Bulmer through an interview in Ainsworth's room. Ainsworth had taken the place of Linton as periodicals manager, Linton's contract having been cancelled in a fit of ill-temper. (Incidentally, Bulmer gave Linton eighteen months' salary to cancel thirty months of contract, adding that he'd give him ten years' salary rather than have him manage his papers another day.) Joan, who sold few pictures, partly because they were very bad, partly because they were rather modern, supplemented a small private income by black-and-white. When Bulmer came in she had just sold a series of sketches touching on domestic life in the Black Country. Bulmer thought her charming, with her frizzy fair hair, her sparkling blue eyes, and the laughing

dimples on each side of her ugly, intelligent mouth. He said: "I suppose you know the Black Country very well, Miss Belmont?"

"Oh, no," said the girl laughing, "I've never been further north than Hendon. But, of course, I told Mr. Ainsworth I was born in Wolverhampton. Now he's bought my sketches he can't very well back out."

Both men laughed at this audacity, and hearing that Miss Belmont painted in oils, Bulmer appointed to go and see her work at her studio. He found her very easy, very light. Joan Belmont looked upon love as a rag. All through their relation she felt it was a terrific rag that she, a little girl from the studios, who had run away from her family, with forty pounds a year, and often lunched on bananas, should have captured this terrific person who could make a reputation and unmake it in a week. It was incongruous, and so it delighted her. Also Bulmer's quick intelligence leapt up to hers, and so, for a while, they burned in a common intellectual flame sometimes so bright that they mistook it for love. Joan Belmont did Bulmer a great deal of good, for she dragged him down from the pedestal upon which other women had placed him. She had no reverence, and once, when the car took them to Hertfordshire fields, she teased him all the afternoon, buried him in the hay, and filled his hair with burrs. And she familiarized him with people from the studios, people he had never met before, and the like of which he had not suspected. But Joan irritated him while she pleased him, because she did not respect enough the influence of which he was proud.

More than anything, in those days, Bulmer enjoyed his influence. It radiated in his office. He liked the feeling of stir that invaded the corner of Fleet Street when he went upstairs. People fluttered papers when he came in. As if fluid energy disturbed them. A certain air of "damn the consequences" hung about the sub-editors' room. He liked to be consulted, to have people come in with facts about Balfour and neat paragraphs demonstrating in a hundred words that Protection was dead and damned. Whenever the telephone bell rang, its voice was that of adventure.

He liked to take slips from the commissionaire when people wanted to see him, especially strangers: there might be something exciting in their unknown business. He took childish pleasure in ringing numerous bells and calling up the staff to be lectured or encouraged. And he adored conferences with his editors; he enjoyed hearing their views, and crushing them under the impact of his own. He liked to throw out on this obedient assembly those Napoleonic phrases in which he was specializing. He liked to think that they might be immortal. One, which combined Radicalism and the new idea of Woman Suffrage, was immortal . . . for a few weeks: "Down with the lords and up with the ladies" said the placard that united Campbell-Bannerman and Mrs. Fawcett.

Another, a delicious one dealing with Chinese Labour, represented twin comedians: Mr. Sam Mayo, singing "Ching-chang, Wing-wang," and Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, also in a dressing-gown, singing: "There is a Golden Rand, Far, Far Away." He was very happy, for he was still sure of himself. Joan Belmont and her Chelsea attitude of "art for art's sake" had not yet disturbed his serenity.

He found her friends intolerable, their conversation incomprehensible; the wilful exhorting of their principles, the symbolisms of the poets, which symbolized nothing, irritated him. Their logomachies, their hatred of success, their worship of gods that they pulled down when these gods gathered too many worshippers, sickened him. And he was offended by their open contempt for Covent Garden Opera, for the Academy, Hall Caine, for all things he respected because they were respectable. He felt hostile and detached. And Joan annoyed him. She had imported from Paris what she called the New Vision: this New Vision struck Bulmer as a new form of delirium tremens. For a time they maintained their relation, though Bulmer suspected that she half-joined the plot to make fun of his crudity, and yet to flatter him; to insult and to use him. There were moments of recovery, as when he fired the young Nietzscheans by saying that he'd rather be publicly hanged than privately canonized, but by degrees suspicion killed Joan's attraction; they guarded and

sparred as they embraced. After a sharp quarrel they parted. He was not unhappy, but he was sore; his pride was touched; he had been laughed at; he had felt small among these small people. Though he despised them he could not help feeling that they thought him gross and obtuse. He was so angry that his daily criticism of "The Daily Gazette" cost him several members of his staff. His criticism was always sharp, and circulated on a slip bearing remarks such as: "Why were the Bishop of London's remarks on the rise of immorality dropped out of the second edition? The make-up is bad. It is no use advertising ladies' underclothes on the financial page. I can't make out what the picture of Dollie Johnson on the back page is. It looks like a gasometer. Or Westminster Abbey by moonlight. *Mem.* Keep up the agitation against wood pigeons."

But that day he was very angry. One of the things that hurt him most was that Joan had sneered at "Zip."

"I don't see what you've got against 'Zip,'" he grumbled. "It brings in over ten thousand a year."

She only laughed in an insolent way, and he was angry because he held it as a superstition that "Zip" was his Napoleonic star. He relieved himself by discovering extreme feebleness in the campaign against the National Telephone Company; being a Liberal organ, "The Daily Gazette" was supporting the purchase of the company by the Government, and so was vilifying it to persuade the public that the Government should take it over.

"Disgraceful!" he shouted, as he ran into Swinbrook's room. "Who wrote this leader? Who slings this pap at the public? Pap! Catlap! The man who wrote this wouldn't lift the roof off a Baptist chapel. There's no guts in this, man."

"I wrote it," said Swinbrook.

"Then what the devil . . ."

"That's enough," said the Scotchman, getting up, "you can have my resignation."

"Oh!" said Bulmer, and paused, a little shaken. "All right. We need a change. This office is rotten, rotten to the core."

"Well, sack the lot," said Swinbrook,

Bulmer did not quite do this, but he dismissed Ash, and in his stead put Benson; while Alford, formerly assistant-editor, took the place of Swinbrook. Also he sacked Ormesby for luck; he had always hated his dramatic chin. He felt better as he sat among the ruins, though still he thought revengefully of the Chelsea people, and of the little damage he could do them. If only they were popular he could hit them. But what could he do to Chelsea loafers except refrain from advertising them? Fortunately he knew how to forget.

CHAPTER VII

KNIGHT

IT was about then that a maniacal strain began to develop in Bulmer. Doubtless because he was emotionally empty, and because, as a drunkard, he discovered that the thing which depressed him could stimulate him, he formed a new paper when he could think of nothing else to do. Thus, within a single year he added to his provincial list "The Leeds Daily Gazette," "The Norwich Daily Gazette," and "The Nottingham Daily Gazette." He no longer asked himself whether papers paid: his morning paper was but a little over four years old, and not one of his publications was ten, but success had come so quickly, so unaccountably, that he thought in terms of power, and money followed. The narrow radius of newspapers outraged him; in spite of special trains, he could not get "The Daily Gazette" into Scotland until midday. And even when he printed it at Manchester, as he soon did after laying down his private wires, even so, "The Daily Gazette" was late for the Scottish breakfast. It was shameful to be late for breakfast! So, by degrees, his vision grew of a United Kingdom scarred in every town by a "Daily Gazette" office; he dreamt of "Daily Gazettes" in America, in the Argentine, in the British groups in Europe, everywhere where English was spoken and where English ears might open to his words. He had no precise message, but he wanted to deliver himself. Once he said to Alford:

"To think that there's an Englishman in Shanghai who doesn't say: 'I saw it in "The Daily Gazette."' . . . It makes me ill."

Alford smiled. He was a short man with a square, bald head. He sometimes clashed with his chief because of his caution. Alford never hurried, was never

surprised. Once, when a big fire where many girls were burnt alive horrified London, Alford calmly telephoned Benson, the news editor, and told him to ascertain whether it was seventy-three or seventy-four girls.

"The agencies' wires don't tally," he told Bulmer, who was smiling at his accuracy. "You may laugh, boss," he added, "but there's only one rule in journalism: check your facts; then check them again; then get somebody else to check them for you—for you may be wrong twice."

Alford conducted "The Daily Gazette" on the best lines of the Civil Service, with this difference: he caused himself as well as his subordinates to be supervised. He proved incredibly valuable to Bulmer in the days prior to the general election of 1906, because he was almost impossible to prove wrong. It was not that he had any scruples in lying, but he always saw to it that his facts were right and his conclusions wrong. The opposition newspapers could therefore only attack his reasoning, and as the public was entirely unable to understand either Alford's conclusions or the reasoning of the opposition, the public, who knew that a fact was a fact, invariably sided with him. It never occurred to them that a fact might convey an idea.

Bulmer's only difficulty with Alford was this solidity, and there was a long conference before the election, during which Alford blocked every catchy idea. It was just like first-class cricket. Alford's difficulty was his honest belief in Liberalism and its party. Bulmer grew so angry at Alford's persistence in pushing forward the land question, the housing question, education and temperance, that at last he banged the table and roared:

"I'll have no more of this. You've no gumption, any of you. Another word and I'll sack the lot of you and buy up 'The Morning Post' staff. It's hopeless having men defending ideas they believe in. You all get carried away by your feelings about what's right and what's wrong. Right! I say rot! We've got to make a case that'll appeal to the man in the third-class railway carriage, who has his lunch at Lyons', or carries it about tied up in a red handkerchief. He doesn't want any of your damned housing or your damned education, . . . and he'd rather go to hell than

go back to the land. He doesn't want anything except to go on getting his wages, his beer, his girl, and sixpence to take her to the gallery at the local 'Empire' on a Saturday night."

"But, boss," said Benson, "we can't exactly boom those things, can we?"

Bulmer looked at him for a moment. He liked his news editor very much. Benson was a wiry little Scotchman. He had begun as an office boy at fifteen in a weekly newspaper in Forfarshire. For the next twenty years he had lived about seventeen hours a day in newspaper offices. He had occupied every position, could write leaders on modern music, or causeries on birds.

"No," said Bulmer, "I know we can't, but . . ." he exploded, "what the hell do you want to boom anything for? Smash, that's the game. Don't you know your trade, any of you? Don't you know that what a man wants is to do another man down? Do him out of his rank, do him out of his language, do him out of his religion. Liberals? They're just anti-Tories. Conservatives? They're anti-Rads. Men don't want things made. They want things smashed. Get it clear in your head: no man wants anything but another man's misfortune."

Bulmer prevailed not so much because he was the boss as because he converted his subordinates. His gospel inflamed them because he spoke it. He thought nothing that the most vulgar could not think, but he thought it with an intensity and brought it about with a will that gave it splendour. A tiger perhaps, but one cannot laugh at a tiger. So he enjoyed enormously the campaign against the Conservatives, which travelled exclusively on two lines: down with tariffs, and down with Chinese Labour. Chinese Labour pleased him most because the compulsory celibacy of hundreds of thousands of coolies lent itself to suggestion. As Bulmer put it:

"Show the public something that's immoral. They'll do it if it isn't found out, and vote against it if it is."

So, day after day, he printed half-columns of police-court reports from South Africa. It did not matter whether the case was white, black, or yellow, or whether

it happened in Capetown or on the Zambesi; it always worked back to Chinese Labour, and to a plea to vote against Lyttelton and his Tory associates. He followed this up by a series on slavery during the ages, above each of which he placed a cartoon of a minister. He had one of Mr. Balfour, carelessly flogging a Chinaman with one hand, in the other holding a book on which was printed, "An open mind is an empty mind." There was also the Duke of Devonshire, snoring hard in a bed the posts of which were spitted through the bodies of four writhing coolies. Bulmer also captured Tom Groby, the Labour M.P., and gave him wide opportunities to terrify the voters with suggestions of coolies imported into England to lower wages.

He would have been less happy with free trade, because here he must defend instead of attacking, if Joseph Chamberlain had not vaunted the happy industrial state of Germany. Bulmer broadly advertised the debatable news that Germans ate dogs. He thereupon printed a serious leaderette, headed:

"THE DOG AS A FOOD.
(Recommended by Mr. Chamberlain.)"

He caused leading doctors to be interviewed on this, and printed their horrified replies, pointing out that if the Unionist Government was put in again dog-steak would obviously fill the bill of fare. This even got into "Jackie's Own Journal," and "Mollie's Own Journal," and into "Wee Winnie's Weekly," which had just been started by Miss Acton. Miss Acton had much talent in this, and every week composed heartrending little stories about the wicked Unionist Government that would starve England into eating Fido if father didn't vote for the Liberals. Then Bulmer, by duplicating his blocks, spread the attack to the provinces and gave the public broadsides of fourteen cartoons, showing John Bull's bad dream after eating the Tariff Reform dinner, and such like. But his real triumph was the Joseph Chamberlain sausage, a horrible, gnarled, greyish object, of which millions were printed on cardboard and slipped into the issues of the Bulmer publications Bulmer exhibited the sausage in his corner window

and soon there was a permanent little crowd, staring at the ghastly thing, by the side of which lay, on black velvet, an exquisite, succulent, pink, varnished Liberal sausage.

Still he extended his programme: "Rob" and "Tip" produced with endless fertility cartoons showing peers scraping working men off the earth with a muck rake, or working men hatching eggs while the crafty landlord crept in and stole the chickens.

"That's about it," said Bulmer to Alford. "No damn building. Just go hitting 'em on those three places—landlords, tariffs and Chinamen. And if it bleeds, hit again."

Now his staff troubled him little, for everybody believed in him. Some grew stale; thus the advertising manager was dismissed and replaced by Penistone, while Gedling, who was fainting after four years of foreign scandals, was replaced by Barby. The time had come, however, when Bulmer's staff mattered very little. He was, indeed, editor of his papers; his editors were only secretaries. Besides, his policy lay outside rather than inside Shoe Lane. There was, for instance, the case of the three-year-old that won the historic race. Bulmer had bought him without disclosing his plans. His name was then Boscobel. Bulmer paid a heavy price for Boscobel, who during the spring won anything he liked on the flat. Some arrangements, the history of which is unknown, were made with the Jockey Club, and suddenly Boscobel began to run under the name of Free Trade. Nobody grasped the meaning of this, though the odds on Free Trade grew more and more favourable to the horse. It was only when, in October, Free Trade won the historic race that Alford understood. But he did not expect what happened at the end of December, just before the election, when Bulmer inserted in "The Daily Gazette" a picture of the horse, a list of its victories, and underneath:

"VOTE FOR FREE TRADE!
HE'S SAFE FOR THE DERBY."

He was very happy because he was busy. He had less of a man's love of power than a boy's love of

mischief. He did not want to remould the world, but he did want to make the Government sit up.

The election came and was won. A week after birthday honours, he fingered new visiting cards: Sir Richard Bulmer. He did not much care whether the servants now called him Sir Richard; he knew that the party which honoured him hated him, and he delighted in this combination of hatred and honour; it was so much more flattering than honour and love. Besides, he had not time for his enemies. He was too uncomfortable in his new position as a supporter of the Government; he had to defend the Education Bill. As his ideas of defence were offence, his papers lost some of their virility. In his anger he dwelt too much on non-political topics. This meant that he developed unduly home interests and scandals. The opposition found it easy to charge him with vulgarity. Besides, his new social position puzzled him; he realized that he owed it dignity, and he could not pay his bill. He tried very hard, as for instance when he bought Bargo Court, in Hertfordshire. A man of his position had to have a country seat, painful as it might be to move out of the two-mile radius from Charing Cross. Still, it had to be done, and Eleanor and Henrietta learned to wear tweeds and to talk horse, and golf, and dog.

Then Bulmer found that he must give week-end parties, which interfered with his desire to do his own reporting. He still did it, in a way. To one of these parties came Mr. Felton, a steady Liberal member, rewarded for his faithfulness by a private secretaryship to a minister. He liked Felton because his worn spirit approached cynicism. Also Bulmer had not yet exhausted the delight of showing off his possessions; and so he took Felton round, painstakingly exhibiting his house, his Gainsborough, his accumulation of Hertfordshire histories in costly bindings. He made Felton admire one of the thousands of cocked hats attributed to Napoleon. Bulmer was unwearied in his pleasure, and he compelled the unfortunate man to examine nearly all the Chinese ivories, of which he had four hundred and eighty-two.

But quietist pleasures did not satisfy him. On

the Sunday morning he said to Felton, with a naïve desire to impress him :

" Now, Mr. Felton, I'm going to show you a bit of special reporting for " The Daily Gazette." You've heard of the Hamilton case, haven't you ? "

" Oh, yes ! that was yesterday, wasn't it ? Wasn't Hamilton found in compromising circumstances in his own office ? Awfully hard on a man with such a good reputation. Of course, the girl's a rotter. Still, we don't know much about it. There are no details."

" No. That's just what I'm going to find out."

" Oh ! How ? "

" I'm going to ring up Hamilton and ask him."

" But, good heavens ! " cried Felton, " you surely don't think he'll talk ? "

Bulmer did not reply for a moment, but his blue eyes twinkled, as they always did when he was about to say something Napoleonic. Then, slowly, he replied : " Oh, won't he ! You have no idea, Mr. Felton, what unwise things a man will say when he is labouring under acute distress."

Felton looked at him, horrified, and, seeing his expression, Bulmer added : " Yes, I know. You think it a bit thick. But that's not our business, we newspaper men, whether it's a bit thick or not. News is news and the public must have it. It's the public's right, it's our duty. If I can get news I must get news. If there was something about me that might interest the public, I'd offer it to the public, even if it damaged me."

Felton stared at him, for Sir Richard Bulmer stood with large, rapt eyes, as if exalted in some idolatry, as if he saw himself, a martyr to his trade, lighting with his own body a candle before the sacred shrine.

" I say," said Felton at last, " but isn't it rather hitting below the belt ? "

" Always hit below the belt," said Bulmer in a low voice, " it's softer. Hit a man in the face if you can ; hit him in the back if you must. There's nothing else to do. I am the public's master. I am the public's slave. I can only be its master by being its slave. Otherwise it won't let me live, and I say : Hail, Public ! Those who are about to live salute thee ! "

CHAPTER VIII

BARONET

VI did not often disturb Bulmer during the years of their separation. At first they corresponded a little, that is, Vi sent him long and rather ill-spelt letters in which she vaguely complained of her health, of being dull, of the scarcity of servants; at the same time she equally vaguely conveyed that she was jolly glad to have got rid of him. And she always asked for money, not because she was extravagant, but because she was entirely incompetent when it came to spending more than five shillings. Vi had been poor too long, and she knew exactly where to get handkerchiefs at three-three when most shops charged sixpence halfpenny. On the other hand, she could buy a bronze, decide to have it picked out in colours, and then, in a fit of temper, call in a dealer and sell it to him for two pounds ten. Her position in her big house at Finchley was rather desolate. She had been fool enough to settle in a suburb, not understanding that suburbs think conjugal separation rather vicious, while Central London thinks them rather spicy. So she had been lonely for a time, until it struck her to contribute freely to the church. By degrees she bought herself into local committees for the employment of the unemployables, and the rescue of women who had gone to the devil and were determined to stay with him. Also, as Bulmer went up in the world, she relatively did so too, and another kind of society formed round her: she was asked to join a local dancing club, and given a seat on the committee of a bridge club. The resultant acquaintances were certainly amusing and not very desirable.

In five years she visited Upper Brook Street only once, and Bulmer twice called on her at Finchley. These

were not emotional meetings. Indeed, their relation was puzzling; it did not amount to actual dislike of each other; they were to each other merely facts. Bulmer had once or twice felt a little remorseful, but, after seeing her house, which was cerise pink except where it was pale blue, where everything was tied up with bows, where the drawing-room mantelpiece was covered with china dogs, Goss china and photographs in silver frames, he concluded she was happy enough. He knew that she wanted more money, and, after refusing her an interview and receiving a curiously clear letter, in which she pointed out that if she liked to go to law she could get a third of his income out of him, he decided to call.

He found Vi more truculent than usual, and quite unjustly decided she had grown ugly. She was that day wearing an afternoon dress of green silk, which did not set off her swarthiness. Also, she was in a bad temper and her under-lip hung heavy. Vi at thirty-nine was still a handsome woman, though rather heavy in the figure, for she still had fine eyes and a passionate, petulant mouth. It was not a very long interview. She began by abusing him and asking whether he thought she liked being deserted by her husband, and the neighbours talking about her. And didn't he see what a position he'd placed her in? When Bulmer replied that she had left him of her own free-will, she shed a few tears. These tears were so diplomatic that Bulmer grew suspicious and said:

"Well, you look all right on it. You've got plenty of friends, I suppose?"

"What's the good of that?" asked Vi. "A woman in my position can't have friends. People talk if men come to the house."

"Well, I suppose men do come to the house," said Bulmer.

"I don't know what you mean," said Vi, looking away.

For a moment Bulmer wondered whether he had fluked on some secret, but he was not interested enough to pursue the idea.

"Look here," he said, "how much do you want? I give you two thousand a year as it is, and you're always

asking for more. Let's make an end of this and have a proper deed of separation and a settlement."

"You do put things coarsely, Dick," replied Vi. "Of course it costs money to entertain."

"How much do you want?"

"I could have a third of your income," said Vi, sullenly.

"How much do you want?" asked Bulmer, loudly, "If it's reasonable, you shall have it. If it isn't . . . well, you shan't. You won't answer? Look here, I'll settle three thousand a year on you for life, and if you don't like it, well, you can go to law."

Vi did not reply for some time. A thousand a year rise was very nice. Only her new friend, the secretary of the bridge club, ex-bookmaker, still very smart in a dissipated way, had told her to stick out for four thousand. She was not exactly in love with him, but he dominated her, though she suspected him. She did not know him enough; in the last two months she had stayed with him in the country three times; sometimes, audaciously, she let him into the house when the servants had gone to bed. He had established over her an animal influence; he was not dear to her, but the loss of him would hurt her. What she really wanted was capital. Then perhaps they could marry if . . .

"Dick," she said, "have you ever thought of letting me divorce you?"

Bulmer laughed. "Why should I let you divorce me? That's pretty cool. You want to drag me through the divorce court and make yourself out an injured innocent."

"Well, you could get rid of me like that," said Vi. "Surely you don't expect me to be divorced after the way you've treated me?"

"Look here," said Bulmer, "I'm not going to talk of divorce. I can't afford a scandal. I've only just been knighted, and I may . . ." He stopped suddenly, as a man about to say something unwise. Vi reflected that it wasn't much use having capital if she couldn't get a divorce. Of course, she might have him watched. But it would be very difficult to catch a busy man. Also her lover told her that the courts were very chancy. She might not get more than fifteen hundred pounds

alimony. And her lover had not asked her to get a divorce; hurt and desirous, she wondered whether he wanted her to get a divorce. Anyhow, he aimed at four thousand a year; so, obediently, she said:

"I don't want to quarrel, Dick. Make it four thousand a year. After all, you're making a lot of money."

They argued for a little while. Then Bulmer said:

"Oh, damn it all, I'm wasting time with you! This interview's costing me hundreds. I'll give you three thousand five hundred a year. I don't grudge you four thousand a year, but I'm not going to be bullied and badgered like this. Three thousand five hundred a year; that's my last word."

Vi accepted. She was a little afraid of him. And, after all, she daren't press much. Supposing it came out about her? So she said: "All right," and as she saw him out of the drawing-room, held up her face to be kissed. She did not hate him, and she thought this politic. He put a hand on her shoulder and kissed her indifferently on the cheek. He had nothing against her. Ten minutes later, as the car petarded down Haverstock Hill, he was thinking of more public affairs. And yet the idea of divorce hung in his mind. He even spoke to Eleanor in general. She objected very violently. Divorce, she said, lowered the morality of women. But she said nothing about the morality of men, presumably expecting nothing of them. Then the subject left his mind. He was very busy just then, booming the South African cricket team which, for the first time, was visiting England; and he had other cares, for now the whole of the Unionist press and, in a sub-acid manner, the Liberal press, was attacking, sometimes his papers, sometimes his own personality. He rather liked that, and sent frequent letters to his provincial "Gazettes," instructing them to avoid direct replies, and to double the intensity of their particular campaigns. As for personal attacks, he took them half as insults, half as tributes. The first he cut out and carried for many days in his pocket-book. It seemed an unjustified attack. All that because he had declared that the Government was weak-kneed and watery-eyed in its land policy, and that England wanted a Man. Then he found a Man

in Mr. Hugh Thornton, a young and abusive Welsh Liberal member. For three weeks he ran Thornton in the most formidable style. Thornton's biography. Thornton's South African medals. The attainments of Thornton's father, scientist and inventor. The seven "Daily Gazettes" and "The Evening Gazette" yelled together: "We want Thornton." Deputations were organzied locally and sent to the Prime Minister to demand Thornton. At last the Prime Minister said: "Oh, well, let them have Thornton. He won't do any harm," and made Thornton Under-Secretary of the department.

Then something dreadful happened. Thornton had lunched with Bulmer several times, and had been lectured for the major part of a week-end at Bargo Court. He seemed mild, and took down in a notebook everything that Bulmer said. Bulmer saw himself remoulding the English land system; every time he made a proposal, Thornton said: "I quite agree." But the day after the young member was made Under-Secretary and Bulmer asked him to dinner, Thornton replied that he was too busy. During the first three or four weeks things went pretty well, and Bulmer had much to do with the drafting of the Land Bill. But he realized that Thornton was giving way only on details, and that the principle of the Bill was all Thornton, with a touch of Prime Minister and no touch of Bulmer. There was a violent altercation, during which Bulmer discovered that Thornton was entirely honest and incredibly obstinate. He retired angrily, and, the next morning, in all the "Daily Gazettes" appeared an article headed T.M.G. (Thornton must go). The machine was reversed. Thornton's former speeches were unearthed; portions were cut out so that his statements sounded inept. Because he had resigned from a mission society on conscientious grounds he was caricatured as the bigot of Llanpwllgybi. The private life of his regrettable aunt was exposed; an extract from Mark Twain, where a man is made to shake turnips from a tree, was fastened to him as evidence of his fitness to control the land.

And, because of this, just this, thought Bulmer, with a true sense of injury, the paper was actually calling him a vulgar boomster, saying that he enshrined the lowest

traits of the stump orator and the cheapjack. It actually said :

" Sir Richard Bulmer's method never varies. You get hold of a well-known man. You boost him ; you make out that you alone know his worth ; you cram his worth down the public's throat ; you terrorize the Cabinet. When you've got him in, you try to boss him. If, by misfortune, your creature turns out to be straight, you cynically shout, for the world to hear, his incompetency, his nullity. You show how often he escaped jail. You search out his relatives, attack some because they are in the gutter, others because they possess presumably ill-gotten wealth. Chops and tomato sauce are the burden of Sir Richard Bulmer's pleas for the government of this country. By chops and tomato sauce, as surely as Sergeant Buzfuz, does he defend his promotions and unmake the mushroom reputations he has raised in the humid cellars of Shoe Lane."

" Yes," thought Bulmer, " I believe that paper doesn't like me." He was proud, but he was hurt, and so he was glad of the sycophants that surrounded him. They were very many, his flatterers. So many that Moss had to see them for him and make a preliminary clearance among the people who wanted to start daily " Gazettes " in villages of two hundred inhabitants, or wished him to take up compulsory gas stoves, or had original methods for the suppression of sex. Sometimes the arts came to him, and here he was always seducible, for the old insults he had suffered in Chelsea in the days of Joan Belmont impelled him to show the arts that he was bigger than they, and could make them in a column. So, now and then, he took up a play, a picture, or a book, generally one that was rather poor and a little pretentious, above the heads of the public, yet not among the stars. Thus he made a success of " The Three Brothers," a sombre play from Sweden ; he made the public like Epstein for a while, and, under his orders, Rustington gave favourable reviews to books which made Rustington sick. But, in the main, Bulmer hated the Chelsea arts. They were so superior. They never thought of circulation and sales . . . because they knew they couldn't get circulation or sales. So they pretended to be above it. He managed to impress this on a man

who came to him and asked him to buy " The Mauve Review."

" What's the circulation ? " asked Bulmer, chewing his cigar with a sulky air that he affected.

" Oh, about two thousand. But of course you, Sir Richard, could raise it."

" No good. To begin with, I never buy a paper. If it's good, the owners don't want to sell. If it's bad, I'd rather make a new paper and kill it."

" But," said the envoy, with a shocked air, " surely, Sir Richard, you realize this isn't commerce exactly. If you buy " The Mauve Review " you'll be in touch with all that is best in literature, in art, in modern thought."

" Oh, yes," said Bulmer, " with all the people who don't matter."

" Don't matter ! "

" No. Nothing matters unless there's enough of it. Your greenery-yallery crowd, your art for life's sake, or your art for art's sake, and your verses that don't rhyme, and your pictures of impressions while having a tooth out, what do you think you're up to ? Blasted lot of water spiders jiggling about while the stream flows on."

" We do not always fail," said the envoy, as if seizing an advantage. " The Yellow Book ran for four years."

Bulmer laughed. " Give me the yellow press rather than the yellow book," he said.

He was really too busy for these people. He was taking, too, a strong interest in the developments of the day, notably in wireless. His offer of a five thousand pound prize to the first man who sent a wireless message to America and got it recorded there, probably hastened developments, for now regular marconigrams were passing between Connemara and Glace Bay. Everything that touched America interested him ; he did not care about Mars, nor about Richmond. One was too far and one couldn't get there ; the other was too near and one got there too easily. America was beautifully difficult enough. It was this liking for America led him to agitate for the Anglo-American penny post. The agitation was not quite sincere, for he discovered that the Government had practically decided to establish it.

So he promptly started the campaign in favour of the penny post, and when in due course the Government executed its previous plan, he was able to announce in all the " Gazettes " :

" WE GOT THE PENNY POST TO AMERICA."

His activities touched all that moves and nothing that is. He gave a terrific boom to Arnaud Massey when the Frenchman won the International Golf Championship, and, as if predestined, travelled in the first car when the subway was opened between the Embankment and the Strand. And still he proliferated. Having met Ratcliffe, a society man, at lunch he put him in charge of a smart weekly called " Tittle Tattle " ; then, wanting to spread his interests, he brought down from Nottinghamshire an ex-international footballer called Annesley, to whom he added, for cricket, his old schoolfellow, Selby. Selby, having married successfully, did no work, and was brought to Bulmer by Tarland, who still refused to write nippy notes on engineering. These recruits produced sporting weeklies called " The Wicket " and " The Goalpost," and soon invaded the local athletic clubs.

Bulmer was sentenced by this activity, not only because life rewarded him, but because it was the only thing to do. Like Napoleon, he could subsist only by victory. And, like Napoleon, he had to demand its fruits. Thus he had to hint to the Government that knighthood was no longer a dignified position, and if dukes were three a penny, knights must be very cheap. So he was made a baronet, and the addition of the word " Bart." on his morning mail gave him certain satisfaction. But, indeed, private life hardly existed for him ; Hettie was becoming more lachrymose as the disturbances of spinsterhood grew more desperate. And she quarrelled with Eleanor, who grew more acid with time. There was a big quarrel, lasting several days, because Hettie had herself photographed and paid eight guineas a dozen. Eleanor called this shocking extravagance, but could not say what the money ought to have been spent on. She repeated with maddening monotony : " You ought to have bought something

useful." When, in defence, Henrietta pointed out that the photographs would make Christmas presents at fourteen shillings each, Eleanor grew confused, for she could not pretend that Christmas presents ought to cost less. But she remained angry, for Eleanor did not appreciate the thing she liked; she appreciated only the things which are publicly recognized as likeable or valuable. There was a good deal of Bulmer in her. She had prejudices, too, like him, but as they were not the same they irritated him. They had a quarrel because all through October she refused to wear furs, declaring this to be weak-minded. When she told him, on the twentieth of October, that she wished it were November first, because then she could wear furs, he flung himself into such a fury that, for two evenings, Eleanor dined out.

And time went on. Now he was thirty-eight, then thirty-nine. He was like a man in a motor-car when the brakes go wrong, able to pull up only if he meets a hill. In this new hysteria he was interesting to the people he met, and at Shoe Lane he was discussed more than any employer by his staff. Rustington, notably, liked to talk of him to Alford. Rustington was a Canadian, had been a schoolmaster. Now he was literary editor of "The Daily Gazette," and, as he had some money of his own, could afford to indulge in good taste. He also indulged in psychology, and had watched and analysed Bulmer many years before he joined the staff.

"You know, Alford," he said once, "the boss is a marvellous man. He's got no brain. He's not clever. He's got no common sense. He never thinks . . . but he never thinks twice, and that's the making of him. He's just one great big desire: as most men can't conceive desire, he gets his way."

"Oh, that's all bunkum," said Alford. "Not clever! Why there's nobody in the country knows what the public wants like him. Northcliffe's not in it. Hulton's not in it. As for Bottomley and his big drum! You put your money on Bulmer, and you won't be far wrong. He knows what the public wants."

"He did ten years ago, when he made 'Zip,' but he doesn't now. His mind is the middle-class maximum, and it never evolves. He hasn't even the sense to be

consistent in his policy. Well, of course, only a damn fool is consistent, and the boss was quite right when he said to me the other day: 'Time changes and views must change with them,' but what's the good of that? The public likes a man to be consistent: gives 'em something to hold on to."

"But I thought you said his mind never evolved!" cried Alford. "Now you blame him for being inconsistent."

"That's just it. The mind behind is always the same, but the policy of to-day clashes with that of yesterday. He thinks he leads because he follows. There is no Bulmer. Do you know his favourite book? it's 'Under Two Flags'; his favourite picture? it's 'The Doctor.' Talk of the middle-class maximum! That's the secret of his success: half England is middle-class; the boss's readers are all alike from Westbourne Grove to Buckingham Palace. And the rest are trying to be like 'em."

Alford smiled. "Well, never mind how he does it. He's a success."

"Yes, the world's given him wheels. That's the test, Alford, wheels. When a man's got his motor-car, you know the populace has granted him the garter."

There were many such conversations in the office, though the Rustingtons, analytical and interested, were rather few. Bulmer attracted mainly two kinds of men—the American showman type and the young romantic who believed in him as his marshals did in Napoleon. They stayed with him as long as they could, and he made few changes on his editorial side: there was no reason to dismiss those men; they were only dictaphones into which, every day, he spouted his policy. It was the special writers went quickly, as soon as he had emptied them of their freshness and their ideas. But of those who stayed, some grew subject to him as women to a masterful lover; others hated him because he absorbed their individuality as the rhizopod surrounds its food; they hated him because he paid them so well that they could not get free: these grew cynical, took to reading "Punch," to morphia, to golf, to anything to convert life into a jolly lie. Others despised him because his mind was crude: those

respected him much more than they despised him, because they had no will, and like snapping dogs were flattered by his casual caresses. All of them felt some love for him, because he was young and naïve. They liked the way in which he said : " I know." Or again : " If I like, to-morrow the Government will do this. I only have to speak the word." And they did not mind his talking big about the best hotels, the right makes of cars, and contradicting on inside knowledge. He was a master, often an unjust master, and so his justice took upon itself the guise of mercy, and his favour made privilege.

CHAPTER IX

PEER

THE election of January, 1910, gave a new direction to Bulmer's misty desires. Until then he had been political in so far as a newspaper proprietor must be so. And he had been a Liberal because he disliked those who were established and hated the inert. But he had not thrown all his energy into the political side, partly because the Bulmer of "The Daily Gazette" was still very much the Bulmer of "Zip," and maintained an undying interest in questions such as: "Should girls wear socks?" His diversions were still the diversions of the people whom he served, and, like them, politics resolved themselves rather into a struggle where you backed blue against red, without quite knowing why, and shouted "Go it, little 'un!" The dignity of Parliament irritated him; he would have been happier in elections conducted as at Eatanswill.

But, having been compelled to take up a political cause, he had done so with his natural virulence, and inside ten years had established power. The opposition hated him, but half-hoped to win him; his own party flattered him, and was unsure of him. But the rank and file loved him because he was no more political than they, and understood that while they wanted some reason to go on voting Liberal, they really preferred pictures of royal weddings, and paragraphs about people. As a result of this, he received two invitations to contest a seat, one hopeless, the other in Cornwall and quite promising. He hesitated for a long time over the Cornish seat. Sir Richard Bulmer, M.P.! That would be nice. He saw himself making speeches, bringing down the Government. Might do something startling too: what about fancy waistcoats, like

Disraeli? But an instinct held him back. M.P., yes, very nice. Still, one would be worried. One would get whips telling you you had to attend, and telling you how to vote. Of course he could do as he liked, but . . . he told himself that it would be a nuisance; what he did not tell himself was that he must start low in politics and make his way. He realized that obscure people, like the Junior Whip, various twopenny lawyers, would have power to interfere with him, just because they'd been ten years in the House. He struggled very hard; he even consulted Alford and Tarland. He believed in Tarland because the engineer's aloofness from notoriety impressed him. He wanted Alford and Tarland to support him in a probably unwise course. He knew it would be ridiculous to take a referendum of his readers on the question, but he would have liked to do so. Finally he refused.

But the incident did not leave him unaffected. At bottom, he resented the condition which had prevented him from taking something that he did not really want. So, having decided not to become a politician, he grew violently political. He developed for Mr. Lloyd George a taste half-reverent, half-antagonistic, and when the House of Lords threw out the Budget and challenged the power of the House of Commons, Bulmer flung himself into combat with extraordinary enthusiasm. He ceased to take any interest at all in his periodicals, except "Zip," because that was his baby and his mascot. He surprised Alford and Benson by cutting out at the last moment articles on the best creepers with which to garnish suburban pillars, and replacing them by abundant Lobby notes. The "Gazettes" turned more and more into violent party papers, and, almost immediately after the challenge, all came out with a plain demand for the abolition of the House of Lords. For the excess of one is the normality of another, and Bulmer had not been able to resist overbidding "The Daily News" and "The Daily Chronicle." He had to soar above their timid proposals for the control of aristocrats. For six months he waged an extraordinary campaign. Day after day he published fragments of "Our Old Nobility," placing in the stocks of public opinion one titled family after another. It was a

flaming, raging exposure ; he advertised the thefts and barbarities by means of which the original earl had acquired his land ; or he told at length the history of the king's mistress who originally earned this barony and that dukedom. Tiring of this after a while, he turned to the moderns, began reprinting reports of old divorces and breach of promise cases in which had figured living peers. Members of noble families who had emigrated for unpleasant reasons were discovered by young specialists whom he employed. He fought two libel actions, won one and lost the other, but in both cases printed the report in full, so that nobody might miss the charge made against him and the charges he made. Indeed, the second case, where he lost heavily, provided a splendid advertisement, for all the "Gazettes" came out with this placard :

"£20,000 DAMAGES
AGAINST BULMER."

In the same issue they took up another noble victim, handling him yet more severely, adding as a footnote : "This may cost us £20,000, but, by Jove, it's worth it!"

It was a lonely struggle, for his staff lacked his taste for excess. Most of them were journalists of long training, and they were accustomed to exposures and attacks, but they were not used to going on with them. Their idea was to snap at somebody as they ran past him, like a bad-tempered collie, and then go on to something else. They were recording instruments, and had no sympathy with persistent campaigns. And the Government had a way of conveying to him that they were very much obliged, of course, but they did wish he'd do it differently. They were rather frightened of him. Indeed, in 1910, the Liberal Government found the situation awkward. They had not gone in their reforming programme as far as they wanted ; they had antagonized Labour by their moderation, and yet they had been forced by the House of Lords into a conflict which they did not want and for which they had no stomach. They wanted to preserve the House of Lords, because they felt that it would always protect them against having to keep their pledges. When one day

Bulmer guessed this, and said that Mr. Asquith was like a little commercial traveller who, in a taproom, challenged a navvy, and was pushed out into the back-yard by an enthusiastic crowd who wanted to see the fight, he was making a statement of fact devoid neither of drama nor of verisimilitude. Bulmer had a few interviews with the usual go-betweens, who tried to teach him dignity. He proved very difficult.

"Look here," he said to an Under-Secretary, "do you want the job done or don't you?"

The Under-Secretary explained that they did want the House of Lords curbed, and that also they didn't. Of course they wanted the job done, but they didn't want the job done. Couldn't Sir Richard appreciate the difference?

But Bulmer was not yet political enough, and, sending all Under-Secretaries to the devil, proceeded to discover, first in Mr. Lloyd George, and then in Mr. Churchill, the Man who could save the country. Mr. Lloyd George lasted nine weeks, and Mr. Churchill four days, at the end of which Bulmer, perceiving no more men fit to save the country, lost the capacity for understandable speech and had to break out into cartoons. A very satisfying one, in December, was "The House of Lords' Football Match," first fifteen *v.* second, in which the House of Commons figured as the football. On election morning, "The Daily Gazette" came out in sixteen pages instead of ten, each one of the six new pages being solely occupied by the words:

"VOTE FOR THE LIBERALS!
DOWN WITH THE HOUSE OF LORDS!"

The victory was won, but narrowly. The Liberal administration, with a majority of forty, a majority founded on the quicksands of the Irish vote, felt the need for all the support it could get. After all, Bulmer had worked very hard for them. . . .

"A peerage!" thought Bulmer, without any cynicism. He told himself: "I'm a lord." A song in "The Earl and the Girl," that Walter Passmore used to sing, passed through his mind:

"I've a mansion in Park Lane and several country houses,
I'm a lord, I'm a lord."

What should he call himself? Bargo? after Bargo Court, of course. Lord Bargo? No, Bargo wouldn't do. That'd been Ellie's idea because if he called himself Lord Bargo she wouldn't have to change the initials on the linen. No, people would write verses about him if he did that, and make his name rhyme with cargo. Pity he couldn't call himself Hertfordshire, but he supposed they wouldn't let him, since there was already a Marquis of Hertford. It worried him, and he went through the gazetteer to find a pleasant name. He didn't think Northcliffe had chosen well. Nothing like so good as Harmsworth. Then he whistled: why lose his name? Why turn himself into a geographical expression? Hang it all! the name of Bulmer was a property like the name of Heinz, the baked beans man.

"I'll be Lord Bulmer," he thought, "Lord Bulmer of Bargo Court, and damn the College of Heralds and the Record Office."

The opposition was overjoyed. They printed, as a parallel, one of his articles of a year before and his Letters Patent.

A Liberal weekly paragraphed him under the title of "Coronets for One," suggesting that he thought his head the only one worth . . . presumably strawberry leaves by and by.

"I say," said Alford, "do you think we ought to do anything about this, sir?"

"Nothing at all. Don't advertise them, and for God's sake don't call me Sir, even if it is in the book of etiquette. What in hell do you think I care for a peerage? All it means is that I can't be had up by a court of law, and can only be tried by my peers. Nice privilege: they'd hang me for twopence, after what I've said about 'em."

He really did enjoy it very much, and for some time wrote letters instead of telephoning, so as to sign "Bulmer" and not Richard Bulmer. Life was good in those days. Things happened. One day it was the opening of the London Opera House, and a chance for a great prize competition to discover a British musical genius (and acquire the copyright of his compositions for free distribution as an advertisement). Or it was the Insurance Act, and day by day putting ginger into

Masterman, and making the Government hop. He still made the Government hop; they had thought to seduce him with a peerage, but they did not succeed. If Bulmer had lived in ancient Athens and they had put an ox upon his tongue, he still would have talked.

The people most impressed were Hettie and Eleanor. Hettie was impressed because she thought it wonderful to have a titled relative. She was still ridiculous, she still wrangled with Eleanor, and she figured at receptions with a majesty that concealed fear. As for Eleanor, she still counted his collars when they came back from the wash, and grumbled at the coal bill, but at last she reluctantly conceded that Dick had succeeded. She had backed her mother in the latter's anger and shame when Bulmer abandoned a safe job in the City for the uncertainties of "Zip," but now she grudgingly realized, not only that he had made a great deal of money, but also that he seemed safe. People who weren't safe didn't get peerages. And she became almost affectionate when a disagreeable little weekly, under the title of "Things We Want To Know," asked: "Whether Lord Bulmer is a hundred thousand pounds poorer now he's a lord?"

Bulmer did not mind. It didn't matter: if they thought he'd got his title for nothing, then they must think he had got there. If they thought he had bought it, then they must think him very rich, which meant he had got there in another way. He knew whether he'd paid for it or not, and the rest was nobody's business. But, anyhow, even if he had paid, "The Daily Gazettes" would all the same attack the sale of honours.

For some months people called him the Weathercock. He did not mind, the world was too interesting. Had not the South Africans come over to meet the Australians? Had not T. J. Matthews done the hat trick twice in one day? And had not the "Titanic" provided, together with an exciting wreck, a splendid agitation in favour of life-belts for all? and a chance to offer an exciting prize for the best life-saving apparatus, to be shown at the special "Daily Gazette" exhibition at the White City? He liked being a lord. One couldn't be ignored. One could only be advertised by hatred. But he realized in himself a new dignity.

Yes, he'd attacked the House of Lords, he'd cried for its abolition. But it hadn't been abolished: was that his fault? He was a member of the House of Lords: he hadn't sought admission. If he was a member of it, he could no longer submit to its being extinguished, and he could not allow it to be inferior or ignoble. Without any warning, "The Daily Gazette" took up the gilded chamber, and opened a competition for the best essays on the reform of the House of Lords, such essays not to exceed half a column and to have a paragraph every five lines. Bulmer had an honest vision of this new toy. A few sittings convinced him that there was in the House of Lords a sort of solid goodwill. He dreamt of excluding the backwoodsmen who only came up to interfere. His taste for the colonies and for commercial success led him to prepare a scheme where most of the hereditary peers were excluded, where the humanized localities from the wilds of Shropshire were replaced by leading lawyers, chairmen of banks and of railway companies, representatives of the free churches, and, to show his Liberalism, secretaries of trade-unions.

"LORD, HELP
THE
HOUSE OF LORDS."

shouted all "The Daily Gazettes." And "The Evening Gazette," and "Zip," and "The Talebearer," and "Mollie's Own Journal," and "Jackie's Own Journal," and "Wee Winnie's Weekly," all piped in their childish treble Bulmer's dream of reform.

CHAPTER X

AT BARGO COURT

"POOR old thing," said Mrs. Felton, "you look tired." She nodded towards the little Vernis Martin table. "You shall have your tea as soon as I can boil the kettle." Mr. Felton watched his wife for a moment as she knelt by the gas stove, equilibrating a copper kettle on the whispering flame. Lying in a comfortable arm-chair, his slippered feet towards the stove, he felt at rest. About him the small service flat was pleasant, with its white walls, its little mahogany tables upon which stood a very few Lowestoft bowls. He looked at himself and his little world, made yet smaller by the convex mirror that reduced the room to a photograph of a stage scene. The Feltons were poor in the way that the well-to-do are poor. Besides his salary as a member, they had four hundred a year of their own. They lived in this flat of three rooms, eating contentedly the sort of meals the restaurants of service flats provide, dining out a little, dining people a little, going to Ranelagh when somebody gave them a voucher, and on Sundays to the Zoo when a fellow offered them a ticket. They had no children. They had been married twenty-five years, and still managed to be fond of each other, though once they had been much in love. Mr. Felton attended regularly at the House and sat on many committees, where he did his best, which was quite good of its kind but not inspired. Mrs. Felton collected Lowestoft china and took an interest in female orphans that had lost both parents. Both liked to dress in grey, and both well enough, yet not too well. After a moment Mr. Felton said:

"You don't know how good it is to see you doing that, Maisie."

She smiled up at him, pleased.

"After Bargo Court, I mean. One couldn't boil a kettle at Bargo Court. One would telephone to the housekeeper's room, who, presumably, would send a requisition to the butler, who would notify the cook, who would direct some underling beyond the conception of my poverty. Like getting something done in a Government office, but quicker. Then, from among nine different kinds of tea, Lord Bulmer's favourite brand would be selected; a test would be made by an expert, with water imported from Pekin. The teapot would be scalded, and its temperature taken with a clinical thermometer. Meanwhile the water would be boiling for a period controlled by a chronometer checked at Greenwich. There would be an expert in pouring to fill the teapot. And the brew would not be spoiled by waiting over long between kitchen and drawing-room, for the time employed in transit would have been calculated by a pedometer. Finally the tea would arrive, and the presiding lady would say: 'Milk and sugar?' Just like that. 'Milk and sugar?' as if nothing dramatic had happened."

"Don't be silly," said Mrs. Felton, laughing. Her mild, ironic, old husband, who hated nothing, but who observed and analysed much more than Bulmer suspected, still amused her. But she was very feminine and knew exactly what she wanted to know. So she said:

"Who was there?"

"Not a large party. Mr. and Mrs. Alford, and Sir Thomas Eggington and his wife, and R. J. Campbell. And there was Miss Bulmer, you know, the one who looks as if she'd swallowed a poker and it got stuck sideways. It's an experience, meeting Campbell; spirituality radiates from his eyes, brotherhood from his hair. He's very beautiful in a way. I sometimes think when I meet a fashionable preacher . . ."

"I hear Lady Eggington's very pretty," said Mrs. Felton. "What did she wear at dinner?"

"Sorry, old girl, I didn't notice. But she *is* pretty."

"Of course you'd notice that, you old devil. But you didn't notice her frock. What's the good of you?

I suppose you didn't notice Mrs. Alford's frock either? Oh, why didn't I go?"

"You were asked."

"Is it my fault," cried Mrs. Felton, aggravated, "that I thought I was going to have 'flu,' and made you go all alone because it might be useful?"

"Well, next time I promise you I'll look out. But, you know, you'll come with me that time, and you won't be noticing frocks either. You'll just sit down and notice nothing but Bargo Court and Bulmer. When you're with Bulmer you don't notice other people and other things any more than you notice electric light when the sun's shining. The house! The house is enough to keep you busy. You start in the car that brings you from the station; the size of it! You roll about in it. Plate-glass windows! Carriage clock! Telephone to the driver! Indicator! right, left, stop, slow, fast. There's no switch for 'I've lost my hat!' Little library! Map of Hertfordshire, map of England, map of heaven, probably. Cigarettes, cigars. Liqueurs under the seat, probably, but I didn't look. That goes on inside the house. And on. Makes one feel disrespectful to get into the rock crystal bath and turn the silver taps. Towels come up in the service lift, baked to the temperature of summer heat. I tell you, old girl, my bedroom gave me the jumps. I had to find my way through eleven switches to get the light where I wanted it. On the dressing-table, scent bottles fit to stock a beauty specialist. Telephone practically in the bed. Secretaire simply dripping with notepaper of every conceivable size. Biscuits and soda by the bed. And something like five hundred volumes in the book-case. Evidently Bulmer's one of the people who buy novels. There was so much W. J. Locke that I had to rush to the biscuits and soda. Culture, of course, also: a touch of Shaw (unopened), 'The Crock of Gold' (uncut)."

"Poor boy," said Mrs. Felton, sympathetically, "wasn't there anywhere you could get away from it?"

"Hardly. There wasn't a table without a Bradshaw (bound in calf), a Whitaker ditto, and the Red Book, and the Blue Book, and Burke, and Debrett, and Dod. I expect Crockford was somewhere about the place.

I hid in the library on Sunday morning. There's a grand place behind the county histories; they could have hidden Charles I. there from thousands of Roundheads. The Parliament could never have got past the dictionaries, the encyclopædias, the treatises on hunting, shooting, fishing, the Kiplings, and the Paters, and the Fitzgeralds; all the histories of all the Englands, and Mrs. Aria on costume, and Tomkins on furniture, and the inventory of the National Gallery, and the hundred worst pictures."

"Did you get on with the people?" asked Mrs. Felton.

"Do you know, I didn't have much to do with them and they didn't have much to do with each other. Nobody wanted to. Everybody wanted to talk to Bulmer. I don't think Mrs. Alford said anything but 'Yes, my lord,' or: 'No, my lord,' except when she said 'Oh, my lord.' Poor dear, I'm sure Alford rowed her for calling him 'my lord,' but she did love doing it. Oh, I can feel the white woolly mat that lies under the cork mat in the bathroom, and the soul of Morny rise from the varieties of bath salts."

Mrs. Felton laughed. "Anyhow, you seem to have done yourself well. I suppose Lord Bulmer makes it his chief occupation to do himself well."

"No, I don't think so. I think he does these things *en bloc*. Gets a specialist down from 'Country Life,' and tells him to turn him out a modern but stately home of England, and then thinks of something else. He's awfully decent. He's not only got a convalescent home for his staff a couple of miles off, but the morning I was there he was writing one of them a little note. The office notifies him when anybody's sick, and he sends whatever's suitable. When they are getting better his secretary sees to it that he writes them a few nice words. And when he hears something's happened in one of their families, a death or something, he sends them all to the seaside. Or lends them a car and a chauffeur for a few days. And as he gets hundreds of newspapers, they're cleared out every night and sent to the hospitals while they're fresh."

"He must be a nice man," said Mrs. Felton.

"He is. He's always doing something for people,

especially if they're in revolt against their families. That must have something to do with his own past. He's got all sorts of young men in the colonies and in America, for whose training he's paying. He actually told me that no young man or no young woman has done any good until they've broken their mother's heart by following their own fancy and then mended it by succeeding in their career. He's got no idea of personal discipline. He seems to think marriage a sacrament; he says that we owe respect to the Church, and he wants to maintain the king; he thinks there is something in woman that should make gross man ashamed."

"Quite right," said Mrs. Felton.

"He hasn't read 'Man and Superman,'" said Mr. Felton. "Anyhow he doesn't want to alter society, and yet he wants to alter individuals. Everybody like a greyhound straining at the leash: that's what he wants. It doesn't connect, you know. Thus one might paint everything in the world pink and yet leave the world itself just as it was. Fact is, he's got no general ideas; he likes to enjoy, he likes to make money; if he could get a bat big enough he'd play cricket using the world as a ball. He's sort of mischievous in a friendly way, like a bright schoolboy. And yet he's solemn, responsible. But summing it all up, the world is his tuck-shop."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Felton, "you don't expect him not to enjoy himself. Here's your tea, made by an amateur. But it'll have to do, after all your grandeur."

Mr. Felton pursued the subject. Two days of contact with Bulmer had obviously made upon him a heavy impression. He drew a vivid picture of this young man of forty-two, greedy, impulsive, ruthless, kindly, closed to ideas and infinitely interested in them. According to him, Bulmer was mainly a soft-hearted, amiable man, who wanted to see everybody well off, or at least with enough money in their pockets to buy the things he advertised in "The Daily Gazettes." Thus "The Daily Gazettes" would get advertisements, and the people would get things, and everybody would be happy. Also he liked his power, and frankly acknowledged that

he liked having big staffs because he felt fit for that responsibility.

"We talked about books a bit," said Mr. Felton. "I find he likes his own serials; he reads 'Zip' for pleasure. And he likes . . . well, people like Jacobs, and the racing novels of Cooper and Nat Gould, and the Jerome humour, the sort of books one sees on a bookstall. But all sorts of other things too—memoirs, books of travel, and, what is amazing, unexpectedly good novels. I think he likes everything. Everything gives him ideas, suggests something that is happening. How can I put it? Yes, he never says: 'One day,' or: 'In the future,' or: 'I wonder.' But he does say: 'This is,' 'I am arranging.' Bulmer is the present, and he makes it plausible. Probably because he believes in it so violently, because he enjoys it so. He likes what he has and he likes to show it. With a sort of naïve vanity. For instance, he's always saying things like: 'Asquith told me the other day . . .' or: 'A few weeks ago when I was dining at Albemarle House. . . . '"

"Oh, bragging?" said Mrs. Felton.

"Yes and no. He does brag, but he's modest. He never pretends to know when he doesn't. He said to me: 'I know nothing about literary criticism.' And to Sir Thomas: 'I don't understand finance.' This as if he didn't want to understand, as if he only wanted to record. Still, he's full of opinions. It's funny, one of the things he's keenest on is the woes and snares of wealth."

"I suppose he's very rich?"

"Oh, very. Nobody knows. Somebody told me the other day in the smoking-room that one could fix on him well over eighty thousand a year, but it must be more. There he is, talking and talking about the rich and their bad digestions, and their inability to enjoy things, and about their children who marry the wrong people, or their sons who get into debt or bad company. As if he were afraid of his wealth. Like the tyrant of Samos, who got so frightened when everything turned out right that to propitiate fate he threw his favourite ring into the sea."

"And a fish brought it back," said Mrs. Felton, smiling.

"Yes, that might happen to Bulmer. Unless he cracks up through nervous excitement and satisfies fate that way. You see, he's always excited, like an octopus with roving tentacles, in case something were to go by. He's always buzzing on the telephone, talking about 'The Daily Gazette,' and giving them exciting information. Or raving because the Government is hiding news from Ireland, or something. He's always got his steam up, and he never gets exactly under way. Of course, he's always full of judgments, things that excite him. He says that we can't coerce Ulster because we're too sentimental to shoot. And if we did shoot Protestants we'd only get the Nonconformists rising. He's got sense, in a way, a sort of practical sense. Like a comfortable man in the City. That's why the comfortable men follow him. He understands them, he understands their pleasures, 'Zip,' snippets of information, the cinema. To him man is a weary giant, and he thinks it's his job to wake him up. He wakes himself up, you know, and then he feels lonely. Feels he's got to stir up the rest. And there he sits, stimulated in a sleepy world. And when he can't think of anything to wake it up with, I think he goes out and buys things to flog his own interest. Anything. Newspapers, blocks, pads, telegraph forms, anything, just to be busy."

"He must feel rather uncomfortable in this sleepy country. More tea? It hasn't stood very long."

"Yes, I think he'd have been happier in America. His violent judgments would have gone down better there. The roving energy of the Americans, their push, their rapidly erected civilization would have suited him better. He likes the colonies, he likes their independence; he says the colonies don't care a hang for us and would cut the painter any day. And to hear him talk about the Cabinet is a lesson in invective. According to him, some of them drink and some of them drug, and some do both, and they're all immoral. I suppose he won't spare me if ever I attain those dizzy heights. You see, he doesn't exactly judge people. He gets an impression of them. When he's dealing with a Cabinet minister, that process is too rough. No ministers are black, and none are white; they're all spotty. That's

why he gets on so well with the masses. They're definite. He understands their love of material property, their hatred of brutal truth, their passion for an excitement to enliven their grey lives. And he can find the material to interest them because he's interested in everything. In thirty-six hours he talked to me about politics, about golf, about the running of newspapers; about Bernard Shaw, whom he calls a good stunt; about Wells, whom he likes because his science business is catching on; he talked about architecture, and how much better they built in Germany; about railways, and the shocking state of the by-lines; about the Yellow Peril; he's awfully afraid of it. And he talked about the suffragettes; he's dead against forcible feeding. 'Let 'em starve,' he says. 'It'll satisfy the dramatic instincts of the public.' It was like sitting for thirty-six hours in a second-class railway carriage coming up from Surbiton. But he's got something that they haven't, something terrific, intensity of interest, intensity of will. He knows desperately what he wants. He may catch flies, but he's got the mind of a lion. Somehow, shrilly, coarsely, stupidly, by energy, by occasional generosity, by courage, he's managed to stumble into greatness."

PART IV

WAY WITHOUT END

" So as who-so-ever hee bee, to whome Fortune hath beene a servant, and the Time a friend : let him but take the accompt of his memory (for wee have no other keeper of our pleasures past) and truelie examine what it hath reserved, either of beauty and youth, or foregone delights ; what it hath saved, that it might last, of his dearest affections, or of whatever else the amorous Springtime gave his thoughts of contentment, then unvaluable ; and hee shall finde that all the art which his elder yeares have, can draw no other vapour out of these dissolutions than heavie, secret, and sad sighs . . . "

—Sir Walter Raleigh : " Historie of the World."

CHAPTER I

JANET

"SHOOT 'em," said Lady Collingham, "shoot 'em. Line 'em up against a wall, one in ten. Wouldn't get any more strikes or rebellions in what's its name? Ireland? Know what I mean?" The old lady looked round her dinner-table with a smile of excessive amiability.

"Don't you think that's rather extreme, Lady Collingham?" said young Ramsey, of the Foreign Office by day and of Ciro's by night.

"Extreme? Stuff and nonsense!" cried Lady Collingham in her famous Sarah Duchess of Marlborough style. "Why! shootin's too good for 'em. I wouldn't shoot a man like Parkin, or Barkin, or Larkin, or . . . or what's his name. Boil him, I say, boil him."

"After he's done his six months," remarked Mr. Simpson. "Can't boil him till he's served his time. It'd be illegal, you know."

Lady Collingham shook her untidy tow and grey hair at him, and, wrinkling her little features, made a face like an ancient monkey.

"What do you say, Lord Bulmer?" she asked. "Oh, of course, I forgot. You're a Radical, ain't you? Must have been one of your young men stole the Crown Jewels from the Castle. You want Bedmond as Premier, don't you? Bedmond? Charlie, is his name Bedmond or is it Redmond? Well, never mind, make it Traitor."

The little party laughed, for everybody adored Lady Collingham, her virulence, her frequent unintelligibility, and her immense enthusiasm for all novelty, provided it was not political. Her husband was still enchanted

with her, and once in his life had defined her : " Bessie won't let me call my soul my own, but the little cat's welcome to it." The conversation went on about Ireland, because that country always brought Lady Collingham to her maximum temperature, and in those moments she was most amusing. So, for some time, Bulmer, carelessly accepting the Radical label, defended the Home Rule Bill.

" What about Asquith's last speech ? " shrieked Lady Collingham, waving her little claws.

" Rather weak, I'm afraid," said Bulmer. " I rather wish he'd never gone to Ladybank."

" He who goes to Ladybank goes to Canossa to-morrow," said Mr. Ramsey. This cryptic remark completely devastated the conversation. Lady Collingham swiftly asked Mr. Simpson, who was just back from Paris, whether it was true that white hair was going out, and whether those green and blue wigs were really a success. Sir Charles Collingham engaged his neighbour, Clara Milford, suffragette, three times in jail for window-breaking, and once for church burning, while Mr. Ramsey turned to fat Mrs. Simpson, whom Bulmer had taken in, and began discussing the new stamped velvets, contrasting them with the light flowered velvets which were then in for opera wraps. Bulmer, suddenly suspended, looked once more at his neighbour. They had exchanged a few words over the soup ; he had had a fleeting sensation of a slim young woman with a warm complexion and a certain air of cold modesty.

" Have you seen ' Joan of Arc ' ? " he asked. (For he had learned what to say to people one doesn't know.)

" Yes," said the woman, and he remembered that she had been announced as Mrs. Willoughby. " I didn't like it very much. I think Raymond Roze has overdone the pageantry, don't you ? "

" No," said Bulmer. " I can't say that struck me. You know, Joan of Arc's life—well, it was rather sensational, wasn't it ? Battles, and bangs, and processions, crowning kings, and all that sort of thing. Must have been pretty busy, to say nothing of the religious stunt. You know, religion is like a newspaper; takes a lot of advertsiing. If I could get a girl like Joan of Arc to

boom 'The Daily Gazette,' why, we'd wipe the floor with the London press."

She smiled with an air faintly amused, and opened grey-green eyes that struck him as peculiar. They were not peculiar, but Janet Willoughby always seemed to stare a little, because her eyelids were excessively curved in the middle, and so the eyes looked large and round. As she did this she raised her eyebrows and, for a moment, Bulmer lost continuity of ideas. He went on talking carelessly, a little discomfited by her interest, which was together intense and cold. As he so did he observed her more closely. Indeed, she was very slim, rather thin, and as she breathed the blue silk of her frock rose very little. Upon her faintly yellow shoulders lay straps of blue and silver. She wore no jewels, save at the breast a large silver plaque studded with sapphires. The conversation wandered from Joan of Arc.

"I suppose it's very hard work running all those papers," said Mrs. Willoughby with a polite air.

"Yes, it is, and one pretty well has no time to do anything else. But one doesn't want to."

"How very interesting," she said, opening very wide her grey-green eyes. He noticed the healthy colour that lay over the yellow skin, the rather ill-dressed brown hair, and the small, regular teeth. Untidy hair and good teeth, Mrs. Willoughby was obviously well-bred. He noticed her hands too—large, but fairly well formed, and faintly red. Girlish hands, and bony wrists. With her long arms, her suggestion of a long body, and her raw forlornness, in her clothes of dull silver and temperate blue, she looked like a drawing by Chardin.

There was a little disarray, for Lady Collingham began to scream as Bulmer refused to promise to come next day with her to a tango tea.

"Oh, do come!" she implored. "You won't? Your last chance."

"No, I won't," said Bulmer obstinately. "I'm not a dancing bear."

"You won't? Then I shall tell what I know."

"And what do you know, Lady Collingham?" asked Mr. Ramsey.

" Lord Bulmer knows what I know," said the little lady in sinister tones.

" Not guilty," said Bulmer.

" Oh, yes, you are ! " said Lady Collingham. " Every man of your age is guilty. If you weren't you wouldn't be fit for society. Lord Bulmer, I hang it over you. If you don't appear to-morrow at the Queen's Theatre at half-past four, I shall tell. And don't think you can buy me off by putting my picture in your nasty Radical papers, like you did Mrs. Schloppenstein the other day, after treading on her train."

" Now, Bessie, really," said Sir Charles.

" Charlie, don't aggravate me. Haven't I known for forty-five years that I married the wrong man without your rubbing it in. But what could I do ? " she asked, helplessly. " They didn't make men like you in my time, Lord Bulmer."

Everybody laughed : one always laughed at Lady Collingham, for when she wasn't funny she was saucy. But Bulmer did not quite like it. He had precedence at court over all this crowd, but still . . . it was so difficult to know when they were chaffing. As if Mrs. Willoughby had observed his flush, and yet wished to say nothing about it, she murmured :

" Isn't she a darling ? It's a sharp tongue but a kind heart."

Bulmer looked at her quickly. He was not intuitive enough to know that she understood his embarrassment, but he felt a vague sympathy that warmed him. So he was impelled to confidence, and said, vaguely :

" One feels a fool."

" But one isn't a fool," said Mrs. Willoughby.

" Oh, I'm not being modest," said Bulmer, " only . . . they chaff."

" There's nothing in it," said Mrs. Willoughby. " I don't think she'd have married you. Not really."

" That's just it," said Bulmer, with sudden sulkiness. " She wouldn't. And no woman's got the right to say the contrary of the thing she means, letting you understand it. If she really does mean the contrary. If she tells the truth she's lying."

" I say," replied Mrs. Willoughby, " that's very subtle."

" I suppose it is," replied Bulmer. " But, you know, nobody ever called me subtle."

" Oh ! I'm sure you conceal the wisdom of the serpent, well, not by means of the cooing of the dove, but still with some effect."

Bulmer looked at her again. Her calmness, her cool air, her assured, grammatical sentences attracted him. He saw that her nose was rather long, and that she had thick red lips, rather poor in curves. He tried to compare her with something ; what he was looking for was " ice maiden," but he couldn't find it. So he hurried, and soon was talking about newspaper booming. She listened gravely, genuinely interested. As he felt this he grew boastful, told her the story of the great placard of " The Daily Gazette," and how he had recovered from his premature announcement of peace with the placard :

"PEACE SIGNED!
'THE DAILY GAZETTE' TOLD YOU SO YESTERDAY!
WHO'S FIRST WITH THE NEWS NOW?"

She laughed. They were in the drawingroom now, and Mr. Simpson was very softly playing fragments on the piano, while Lady Collingham sat by his side, stroked into repose by the music she loved. The others gathered round the mantelpiece, where Clara Milford was grinding the faces of the men, while Mrs. Simpson amiably heaved in a large chair. So Bulmer and Mrs. Willoughby talked for a long time. She liked the frank vanity with which he exhibited his origins, and for the sake of interesting her he exaggerated his early poverty

" How wonderful it must be to have risen as you have," she said. " While I . . ." She leapt away from self-revelation, like a frightened fawn.

" Yes," said Bulmer, " but, you know, rising . . . one's never sure one's on top. If one's born on top one can't fall off. And if I fell off I'd have a long way to come down."

" But you won't fall off," said Mrs. Willoughby. " You'll rise and you'll rise until you bang your head against heaven."

" Then I get a bang whatever I do," said Bulmer.

She laughed, and he felt witty. Mrs. Willoughby wondered if she liked him. Of course, it was an experience meeting him, the man who was going to beat Northcliffe. And he was not disappointing her ; he exhibited all the private energy and the ruthlessness which she had expected. But she had not expected to find him modest. It was a curious feeling, and a little repulsive. He had captured so much wealth and power : how dared he also grasp at modesty ? She smiled at herself as she reflected that there was something pleasant even in that ultimate greed. While she thought, Bulmer stared at her, forgetting by degrees details of her personality, and attaching to those of her person. He did not conclude that she was beautiful ; he was critical of women's points, and he saw that the long nose made her look inquiring, but the whole effect of her, her height especially, for she was taller than he, her amiable negligence, her courteous self-assurance, filled him with an exquisite desire to touch her, reverently, perhaps. She disturbed him. And she seemed so unaware of it. She talked to him like a well-bred young lady in her first season. She registered what he said, with interest, but without emotion. He felt the need to know her better, and grew clumsy :

" I haven't met your husband," he said.

" I am a widow."

" Oh ! Sorry. Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked that."

" Why not ? I'm not in mourning."

" Did he——"

" He died eighteen months ago."

Bulmer paused. He knew he was being indiscreet, but he couldn't stop : " I suppose it's very hard," he said, " being a widow so young. And all alone."

" I'm not so young." After a pause, seeing that he was going to question her and as if she decided to save him from his own indiscretion : " I'm twenty-six. I've got a little boy. That's all."

After a long pause he said : " I hope you'll let me come and see you." He knew he ought not to say that yet, but, for a long time, he had chosen to say what he chose, and he found people so ready to accept this

attitude that it had become a habit, even though he disapproved of it.

"I shall be very pleased," said Mrs. Willoughby. "Don't bother about my address. It's in the telephone book under Mrs. K. W. Willoughby."

Bulmer did not that night go to sleep at once. He was puzzled rather than preoccupied. He recreated her before his eyes, and swore because he had forgotten for the sake of their redness the shape of her lips. For some time, sitting in his pyjamas, he remained in vague meditation. Then he suddenly jumped up and went to the dressing-table to look at himself in his shaving mirror. The enlarged picture of his features came up. Still fresh! Rather a lot of grey about the temples. But his blue eyes were very clear, and his thin, intelligent face pleased him. By degrees he saw himself no more; divorced from his body his spirit sped on misty pinions into an impalpable realm. He was uplifted in an intolerable delight, to which he tremulously gave the name of love. At last he switched off the light, and, as he got into bed, said aloud:

"I want her. I'll get rid of Vi. I must. Yes, I want her."

He telephoned Vi at about half-past eight next morning. It was a short conversation, characteristic of both of them:

"I say," said Bulmer, "I want to divorce you."

"What!" said Vi, in a trembling voice, wondering whether he had found out about the secretary of the bridge club.

"Want to divorce you, see? You'll be all right. I'll make it worth your while."

"I never heard of such impertinence," gasped Vi. "And, anyhow, I don't think it's gentlemanly to discuss it over the telephone."

"Oh, well, if you must argue about it, I'll come along. I'll be with you in an hour. Good-bye."

The interview produced no results, for Vi soon discovered that Bulmer knew nothing about her affair, which was now finished, and had been replaced by a feeble intrigue with a flying man, aged nineteen, and stationed at Hendon.

"I don't see it at all," she replied, when he had done.

"Why should I let you divorce me? One might think I'd behaved badly."

"That's not the question. I just want to make an arrangement. Everybody does that. There's not one divorce in ten that isn't a fake."

"Well, if that's so," said Vi, "and if I was to agree, it seems to me it's for me to divorce *you*, not you me."

"Oh, I can't have a fuss! In my position it'd be awkward."

"Well, what about my position?" said Vi. "What do you think my friends would say?"

"Oh, damn!" said Bulmer. "How much will you do it for? What about ten thousand a year?"

Vi hesitated for a moment. It was a lot. Still, what would she do with it? The boy's tastes were modest.

"I don't see it at all," she said at last. "You don't think I'm going to call myself Mrs. Violet Bulmer, or Lady Violet Bulmer, or whatever it is, after being Lady Bulmer. No fear."

They argued for a long time without result. Bulmer realized that if he told her that he wanted to marry somebody else, then on no terms would she divorce him. Even if he agreed to that.

In reality he knew that it would not come to that. The idea of running away with Mrs. Willoughby did not frighten him so very much, even though a divorce was more serious for a Liberal than for a Conservative. Only the idea of Mrs. Willoughby running away with him, well, really. . . .

He went to see his solicitor. Another unsatisfactory interview. He realized in advance that it would be unsatisfactory, for he could not escape knowing a little law.

"I'm afraid," said the solicitor, "that one of you must suffer."

"How do you mean, suffer?"

"Well, one of you has got to do the divorcing, and the other has got to give cause."

"Oh, I know, I know," growled Bulmer. "But why should I be dragged through the courts? After all, I pay." He felt injured; if a man was ready to give a woman ten thousand a year to get rid of her, well,

really, if the law wouldn't endorse that sort of thing it was unfair to the woman.

"No, there's nothing for it, Lord Bulmer. It's not for me to recommend collusion, but," he smiled, "I've been in the law for many years, and I've come across half a dozen divorces that weren't arranged. At least, I think they weren't arranged. No doubt, if Lady Bulmer were to become aware of some irregularity on your part, and if she realized that you would agree to a verdict giving her this very generous allowance, you. . . . Well, I could talk to her, and we should see."

"But, damn it all, man!" shouted Bulmer, "do you really think I'm going to Leicester Square and . . . really this is absurd. To begin with, I'm a peer, and a recent creation like me can't do these things. If the barony dated back to Edward VI., I don't say."

"Oh, I don't know. In these days." The solicitor talked for some time, and Bulmer listened sulkily. He couldn't very well tell him that if he followed the obvious way of giving Vi cause for divorce, he would spoil his chances with Janet. (He had made inquiries and discovered her name.) Nor did he see Janet in the part of co-respondent. If he had seen her so he would not have wanted her.

"I suppose," said the solicitor negligently, "if you'll excuse my suggesting such a thing, but . . . well, Lady Bulmer has been living apart from you for a long time . . . sometimes in these cases ladies commit imprudences."

Bulmer did not understand for a moment, then bellowed with laughter. "Vi! One can see you don't know her. Besides, she's forty-six." The solicitor said nothing. He knew women of forty-six, especially women of forty-six with several thousand a year.

"No," Bulmer went on, "that's no good." He remembered her slowness, the brooding passion which he had not understood and taken for indifference, Vi's lack of social taste, her way of looking away from men which to him suggested coldness.

"No," he said again, "she prefers chocolates."

"Well, one never knows," said the solicitor. "It wouldn't cost very much to get somebody to keep an eye on her for a little."

"All right," said Bulmer. "You have a try. But you won't catch anything."

Bulmer was right, for, after two months, the detectives reported that Lady Bulmer's life was quite orderly, and indeed that she often went to bed at half past nine. The attempt might have been successful if Vi had not been terrified by the interview, and had not dismissed the flying man. Realizing that Bulmer wanted to get rid of her, she was ready to go to any extreme of virtue rather than content him. So all Bulmer got was an idea for the reform of the divorce law, which provided a savage but valuable correspondence in "Zip" and paid for the legal expenses.

Meanwhile the new attraction gained strength. Taking advantage of her implied consent, he called on Mrs. Willoughby at her flat in Bickenhall Mansions. She received him in a spirit that was either cool pleasure or reluctant disapproval. He did not quite know which. Seated on the couch behind her tea-table, she was like a fresh green shrub with tight blossoms. She talked commonplaces with an original twist. She listened to him endlessly, and he expressed himself with a new facility.

"You know," he said, "I can't explain what I mean, only I try to tell you things in the way I feel them."

"Don't you always do that?"

"I don't know. No, I don't seem to try with other people. I just say what I mean, but with you I try to say what I really mean."

She flushed slightly, for she was of those women to whom an intelligent approach makes a stronger appeal than a cry of passion. And it was flatterring that this great man should for her try and fail. He was very happy with her, for she did not provide him with the feather bed of adulation that he found in most men and all women: she stimulated him. She suggested to him that within his being lived something subtle and exquisite which with her help he might rescue. And her surroundings charmed him. She had a taste for white paint, and, indeed, there was in the flat no crude colour. The couch was made of grey linen, and was sprinkled with cushions of black, silver, pale blue, and water green. Mrs. Willoughby refused to be affected

by her period : Bakst and the Russian ballet, Futurism, the crimson denunciation of " Blast," did not touch her. She moved among women clad in scarlet and gold, turbaned in emerald, stockinged in cobwebs, but remained gracious and aloof in her pale, disdainful gowns. She lived among Georgian furniture and Queen Anne silver ; as a rule, when he went to her, he found in her large, shapely hands, a book of verse bound in white, or essays mauve inside and out. They had come to a certain familiarity. He had dined at her flat with pleasant, semi-elderly people who had heard of " The Daily Gazette " but never read it, who had enough money and wanted no more, who did nothing very much, except make ready for the country when they were in town, and plan visits to town when they were in the country. They had nothing at all to say, and said it with some charm. It was rarefied, this atmosphere. It lent itself neither to cartoon nor leaderette.

She had shown him her little boy too, a large, solemn child of two, rather like her with its large, appraising eyes. Jack was getting to know him, and sometimes gave him a condescending smile. And he touched it with some emotion ; it struck him once that to hold small Jack must be rather like holding her : Jack was so consenting without being desirous ; he was so polite about it, though friendly. For now Bulmer was wholly in love with Janet Willoughby. They were still formal, called each other Lord Bulmer and Mrs. Willoughby. But once he came for her in the Rolls-Royce and insisted on taking her to Kew Gardens. She hesitated a little, but, seeing nothing that she could object to, agreed. Her nearness was delicious, and in the hothouses she stood among the orchids and the palms ; about them, the scented air rose humid and caressing. She affected him extraordinarily ; so cool beside these sensuous flowers. Suddenly he said :

" How different you are from them. You're like . . . warm snow."

She smiled. She did not understand him, but she was not displeased. She did not know what she thought of him : so much brutality covering a spirit that seemed to her vulgarized by circumstance. He told her how much the greenhouses had cost to build. She didn't

want to know that. But she wondered whether she would have liked it better if in this place he had spoken swooning verse. She did not know whether she liked him; he embarrassed while he pleased her. He so manifestly said the wrong thing. He was . . . sensational. But it was his function to be sensational. His objectionable qualities were his attractions; only excess made him possible.

She understood him better when, later on, he made her come to the office to see the paper through the press. He began by taking her round properly, by showing her the copy as it was handed to the linotype operator, explained the machine (much to her boredom); he made her follow the stereo plates, showed her how the wet moulds were taken, and made her stand beside the press and read from the curved plates to-morrow's news. But, after a while, he could not bear to stay outside this issue. While showing her a forme where display advertisements had been set up by hand, he grew enraged by the breach of a small regulation: one line of type in an advertisement had been drawn from the same fount as a "Daily Gazette" heading. He shouted for the foremen, who came, followed by several compositors. He rang bells, and demanded that Mr. Penistone should be sent for from his private house. Irrelevant persons joined the group. And when, at last, the mistake was amended, he remembered Janet, who stood outside the group:

"Sorry," he said, "but if one doesn't keep an eye on things oneself, well, you see what happens. Do excuse my having left you standing there."

She smiled. "Of course you must look after your work. I think it's splendid."

He gave her a grateful look. He understood that she was telling the truth, though he could not guess why she thought him splendid, and how much she could appreciate his disregard of her. He thought he should stay by her side as she was his guest, while she was glad to find him caught up by a sort of creative impulse and become a rough, inhuman figure.

More and more often now, though he dared not test their relation, he looked at himself in the evening in his shaving glass.

"Forty-two, nearly forty-three," he said. "And she's twenty-six. It's a lot." Then he thought: "Well, in another year I shall be forty-four. That won't improve things. Why not try now?"

But he did not try. He was afraid, for she roused in him none of the consciousness of power that he drew from other women. He knew that her refusal would hurt him so much that he dared not risk it. It was the first time that he had ever been afraid of anything. Besides, what was the good? There was Vi. He was so disturbed that he spent an evening with Tarland at the engineer's dowdy house in West Kensington. He intended to tell his old friend, but he could not: he was like a miser unwilling to reveal his hoard. Then a sudden despair overcame him. The future was hopeless. He had not the courage to assure himself of its hopelessness. It was as if he hypnotized himself into believing that there was hope. There was, so long as he did not test it. Suddenly he passed through a patch of hatred: he resented Janet and his desire of her. He told himself: "I'm not going to make a fool of myself. Never see her again. That's the only thing to be done. I've gone too far as it is. The only thing to do is to cut my loss."

CHAPTER II

CUTTING A LOSS

FOR a few weeks Bulmer was like a lion in the arena after the emperor has pardoned the Christians. Uncontrollable fury invaded him. He felt the need to assert himself. As if he inwardly realized his cowardice before Mrs. Willoughby, as if to regain his self-esteem, he had to face something difficult and dangerous. He had read "Four Feathers"; it was a little like that. There was Ulster, yes, of course, for this was January, 1914, but he was tiring of Ulster. Being a Liberal, he obtained no satisfaction from the enlistment and parades of the Carsonites, while the National Volunteers, arming in opposition, seemed to lack the impressive quality of the Ulstermen. He realized that this was because the Ulstermen were arming against the law, while the National Volunteers prepared to uphold it. So the heroic rôle fell to the Ulstermen.

Chance led him to discover that, some years before, Mr. Clémenceau had waged a ferocious compaign against official delays in the French Civil Service. A sudden destructive joy overwhelmed Bulmer. He too would be a tiger. He too would break Cabinets and raise the old stones of Whitehall. The assault began at once, and was frightful. He had agents in every Government office, who communicated facts over the telephone. Within a week he had collected endless instances of delays in answering letters, of forms sent to people who were dead or in lunatic asylums; he caused a Civil Service drama to be composed, where the principal parts were taken by "Snoozer" of the War Office, "Slack," of the Local Government Board, and "Passiton" of the F.O. "Snappy Bits" came out with a song entitled

" Winnie of Whitehall," where the words, " More delay, more delay," were set to ragtime. When at last a dossier dealing with twenty-four pounds of apples, which had been allowed to rot in an experimental farm, was stolen from the Board of Agriculture, copied by twelve typists, and returned next day to the unsuspecting Board, the Government felt that it ought to do something. The correspondence about the twenty-four pounds of apples, and the compensation due to the farmer, had been going on for six years ; also the farmer died, leaving the case unsettled. " The Daily Gazette " took up this pitiful story under the title of : " Who Broke The Farmer's Heart ? " Day by day portions of the dossier were printed. And to make quite sure that the public should not miss the point, Bulmer caused minutes reading : " Noted, thank you ? " or : " Passed to you, please," to be printed in block lettering. After four days, the Government realized that, at this rate of publication, the revelations would go on for several months. They knew their dossier ; it was a large one. Private secretaries telephoned ; a few kindly words were said to Bulmer at dinner. But this did not move him. Indeed, he did not hesitate to print reports of these advances, and to declare that he would fight to the last apple.

Then, while the Attorney-General was considering whether Bulmer could not be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act, the attack stopped. References to the Civil Service ceased ; Bulmer had grown tired of the campaign and had substituted therefor a competition with a thousand-pound prize for a new song to beat : " You made me love you, I didn't want to do it." Also, after a month's abstention, he had gone back to Janet. No explanation took place, but his sudden telephone call and his hurried question : " Will you be in this afternoon ? " struck her as significant. She hesitated before letting him come. If one saw a good deal of a man regularly, it was normal. But if he stopped coming, and then returned, he implied that he came for more. And she did not know yet whether she was attracted to him, could not decide whether she was to be attracted entirely. So again Bulmer sat in the small flat, and played with Jack, who knew him again, but

obviously treated him like some one he'd met in society. He talked more about his policy than he had done until then, and Janet ventured to disapprove of his attack on the Civil Service.

"What!" said Bulmer, "you've read it. I thought you didn't read 'The Daily Gazette.'"

"No, I didn't. But after meeting you and hearing all about it . . . well, you know, one gets interested."

He looked at her with humble, adoring eyes. "Do you like it?" he asked excitedly. "Now that you know it better?"

She hesitated. He was so intense in his desire that she should care for his paper. He was ridiculous. Other men had wanted her to care for them. But he was touching; it was so selfless, the love that he gave to his detestable paper. So she said:

"Yes, I do very much. It's so bright, so intelligent. Only of course . . ."

"Of course what?"

"Well, you don't seem to care what you hit. Our old traditions."

"I've no use for traditions. I make 'em. I made one when I was at school. It lasted seven months."

She gave a high, crystalline laugh. "Seven months, Lord Bulmer! I'm afraid your tradition hadn't much staying power."

"Oh, it was all right, only it got worn out. You know traditions wear out very fast in these days."

"You haven't got it at all," said Janet. "A tradition, a real one, can't die."

"Oh! what does it do? Just lie about and block the road?"

"Some people think so. You do, I believe."

"No, I don't," cried Bulmer, anxious to like what she liked. "I tell you I'm making a tradition: the tradition of keeping up to date. The tradition of being active and keeping your ears open to everything, and doing everything, and understanding everything."

"That's not a tradition," said Janet; "that's epilepsy. What you really do is to smash traditions. Oh, you may be quite right, but you can't make things if you hate them."

" You've got to smash things before you build new things. I've no time to love things, I hate too many."

" But surely you must care for something, to say nothing of 'The Daily Gazette'! I mean abstract things—your country, or your party, the things to which you belong."

" I don't belong to my party. My party belongs to me."

She laughed. " Then you'll never be a citizen of the world, for the world can't belong to you."

" I'm not so sure," said Bulmer. " After all, it's a long life and a small world."

" But what if you do conquer the world ? " she said, bending forward, her eyes very wide. " Supposing you did end up like Napoleon ? Will you care for it ? Will it be any good to you ? You want to tread on the world instead of loving it. You've got to love something, you know."

After a long pause Bulmer looked at her with a little fear in his eyes and said, rather roughly :

" What's the good of my loving what I can't get ? " She understood him and drew back. " What's the good of my talking about it ? I'm married. She's not a bad sort, but we've lived apart for years. You know all about it."

" Yes," she murmured, " I know."

" Yes, of course you know. You know all the gutter gossip that comes from people I've sacked, and people I've cut, and people I won't advertise. I suppose they told you that I knocked her about, and drank and drugged. Suppose they told you I tried to poison her, and was too much of a muddler to finish the job properly."

" Don't," she said, shaken by his bitterness. " You know you're talking nonsense." She felt that he was assuming heroic attitudes, and she hated it.

" It's not nonsense," he went on. " It would have been if I'd said it three months ago."

" I don't understand," said Janet.

" I didn't feel like that three months ago. I didn't know you then. She wasn't in my way then. I'm not used to having things in my way."

She was silent for a moment. No, he was not taking up attitudes. It was much worse than that. And, suddenly, she asked herself what she would do if he were to rise from his chair and come closer. She could not resist her interest in him ; he was repulsive in the way that a rhinoceros is repulsive ; only one can dislike but one cannot despise a rhinoceros. Then, with a note of sincerity in his voice that she could not mistake, he rested his head in his hands and said :

" I wish I was dead."

A new emotion passed through her. Now that he was abased, she felt that he was a great man, and impulsively she bent across to him and pressed a weak hand, which lay limp in hers. " Don't despair," she whispered. " I don't know why I say that ; I don't know why you shouldn't despair. But you know." Then she freed herself, for, as he looked up at her, she saw in his eyes such an entreaty that she feared a failure in her strength, now that his power was turned to weakness.

He left her soothed, but soon the sense of his unarmed state inflamed him with rage. He subjected his publications to the devastating criticism through which he sometimes vented his ill-humour. Within a few weeks he got rid of Ainsworth and replaced him by Ford, while the foreign editor of " The Daily Gazette" was replaced by Renton, a professor of European reputation. And, for no particular reason, Ratcliffe was removed from " Tittle Tattle " ; a racy person called Oakley took over the work. This violence, these novelties, satisfied in Bulmer a sort of revengefulness : if he could not rule mankind, at least he could make and break men. He liked making a man, especially a young one, for he was broad enough to feel no fear of the young generation, and he was leader enough to use it. He quarrelled with youth only when it strove to lead, and then expelled it, full of contempt rather than hatred. But he was not malicious ; when youth succeeded he always accorded it equality. He was like Mr. Bernard Shaw's tailor, the only creature in the world that understands young men, because he takes their measure anew every time he sees them.

Thus the assistant editor of " Snappy Bits," whom he

very much valued because the man had been a steward on the P. & O. and acquired amazing information as correspondent for Reuter, insisted on leaving him to take over a news agency. Bulmer raged for nearly an hour, questioned the financial chances of the venture, and refused to listen to replies. " You'll fail. Take my word for it, you'll fail. It's all rot. It's a rotten agency. You'll lose your money. And don't you offer us any news ; we've got all we want. I didn't think you were such a fool." The only thing that Bulmer did not say was what he felt : " You're my man. Mine. And you mustn't have anything of your own." But the man was obstinate, and, a few months later, Bulmer saw that opposition papers were buying news from the agency. Then he met his ex-subordinate in Whitefriars Street. Having completely forgotten their angry conversation, he shook hands with him heartily and said :

" Well, how are things ? " The reply satisfied him. " How many contracts ? Seven ? Oh ! And two more coming. At how much a year ? Not bad, not bad. Well, well, I'm very glad you're on a good thing. I always thought there was something in news agencies. The old ones have got into a rut. My dear chap, I can't tell you how glad I am that I shoved you into it."

Bulmer was entirely sincere. All he remembered was that he had had a talk about the agency ; now that the agency was gaining support, he instinctively ranged himself on the winning side. He was in those days already martyred by the opinion he had created. Thus, a cartoonist who was fighting " Spy " in " Vanity Fair," and called himself " Cockatoo," cartooned him for a fashionable weekly. When Bulmer saw the cartoon he lost his temper. He didn't mind being taken off, he said, but he did want to know whose caricature it was. Who the hell did " Cockatoo " think the cartoon was like ?

" Like you, sir," said " Cockatoo."

" You must be dippy," said Bulmer. " Like me ! It's like you. It's like anybody. Let's test it." He rushed to the bell, called in the footman, instructed him to send down Eleanor and Henrietta at once. When

they came down he told the footman to stay. Then he made him fetch the butler. Holding up the caricature he challenged them to say it was like him.

"Ridiculous!" he shouted. "Absurd! Were you drunk when you did this?"

Then "Cockatoo," who had a temper, forgot that he wanted to sell Bulmer the original, snatched it away and walked out. The cartoon appeared. Six months later it appeared again at the one-man show of "Cockatoo's" collected cartoons. When "The Daily Gazette" art critic did the show, he naturally noticed Bulmer's picture, and, assuming that "Cockatoo" was a protégé of his employer, gave him a half-column of praise. Next morning, in bed, Bulmer opened "The Daily Gazette" and saw the notice. He read it carefully to the end. He vaguely remembered the incident. Then he reflected that perhaps he'd been hasty. So he took up the telephone, and, after a time, "Cockatoo" was found.

"I say, old chap," cried Bulmer into the receiver. "Seen 'The Daily Gazette' this morning? We've given your show a hell of a notice. Splendid, my dear chap, splendid! My man says there hasn't been a caricaturist like you since Leech. Splendid! How much do you want for it?" After all, "The Daily Gazette" was public opinion. He couldn't help it if it was his own paper. It was public opinion all the same. His opinion. You couldn't tell one from the other.

These days of emotional uncertainty drove him to the drug of enterprise. In the five months that preceded the war he managed to create "The Bristol Gazette" and "The Wolverhampton Gazette." Also he developed a remunerative line of novelettes, now run by Ford as "The Buffalo Bill Series" (for boys), and "The Hildegarde Novels" (for girls). His new cartoonist, "Tick," became famous in a few weeks in Bulmer's new comic, entitled "Smiles." Then Bulmer reflected that though he might be rich he was not quite serious enough.

"Religion!" he cried, "that's the ticket. We've never given religion a show, and there's kick in it yet." So Bulmer engaged the literary secretary of a Methodist

body, and soon had him running " Ritual," which was very High Church, and " The Working Christian," which sheltered ethical nonconformity under a thin veneer of faith. He was not happy, but he was excited and disturbed : it was almost as good.

CHAPTER III

A PARAGRAPH

BULMER paused for a moment in Baker Street. He looked up at Bickenhall Mansions, as if for a moment a voluptuary; he sought to maintain anticipation and defer delight. He had not seen Janet for eleven weeks, during which, with a married sister and her family, she had been touring in the South of France and in Italy. She had written to him several times in cruel and charming detachment. She enjoyed Florence, and terrified him by suggesting that *Palazzos* were very cheap and that she was thinking of buying one. Fortunately she added: "It's only a cottage, really. A cottage on the Arno! How romantic! But then a woman of my years makes a fool of herself when she's romantic. One can be romantic at twenty-one, and one can be romantic at forty-one; but when one's twenty-seven one's got to think whether Florentine sanitation is good, whether Italian milk suits a British baby, and whether one can bear the two days that separate one from 'The Daily Gazette.' Of course, there *is* 'The Continental Daily Mail.' That *is* a point." He laughed. It was so warming to have her chaff him, and flaunt the detested rival. He looked at Baker Street Station, that in the light June air looked like a Turkish bath conceived by Sherazade; blue distance hung beyond the green cardboard trees of Regent's Park, and the shadows fell blurred at the edges, as if drawn in charcoal. For a moment Bulmer felt beauty; then he went briskly to the lift.

It was delicious in the flat; it was as he had expected. She rose with a certain warmth to greet him, and for a moment he held her hand in both of his, looking

humbly into the open grey-green eyes that were so calm, at the red mouth that smiled, half-glad, half-apprehensive. An impulse passed through him to take her in his arms. Then he was afraid. And the impulse reasserted itself, but as it did so she freed herself. It was too late. They sat down, for a moment silent. He had feared that minute because of something that had happened the day before, and he was glad when she began to talk of her journey, of places seen, of her sister; he grew more and more assured that she did not know. She might never know. Then she said:

"It's been very nice, but, oh! you can't tell how nice it is to be back in London. The taxis and the pretty girls; there aren't any in Italy, or they've got no complexions; and the dear old Ebury Bridge omnibus, and the nice smoky smell. I *am* enjoying myself. I'd like to lunch at the Carlton, Claridge's and the Ritz the same day. And I've sent out for all the newspapers, all yours and all everybody's. And I'm going to read them all."

Bulmer laughed. It was adorable to find such a woman fit to be such a child. But he did not like her remark, and said:

"Oh, I shouldn't read them all. They aren't worth it. You'll have something else to do."

"All," said Janet firmly. "I want to hear what everybody's doing, who's been married, and who's been buried; and all the theatre plans, and all the frocks, and all the scandals."

"Never mind that," said Bulmer, rather roughly, and his hands moved as if he would seize her, protect her.

"Why?" she asked, suddenly serious.

"Stay as you are. Don't be like other people, soiled by everything. Just be . . . well, you laughed at me when I said that, like warm snow."

She looked at him intently for a moment, then said:

"Do you mean to say that you're bothering about the things they print in the papers? You ought to know better, since you print them yourself."

"I . . . you . . ." said Bulmer, wondering whether she knew.

" What do you think I care ? " asked Janet. " Perhaps you thought I didn't know."

" No, I didn't. I hoped you didn't."

She smiled. " Oh, Innocent ! Do you really think that the world is going to let people like you and me alone ? We're much too interesting. Why, I found two copies of the paper as soon as I arrived, sent, no doubt, by my dearest friends, with the passage marked in blue."

" Don't," said Bulmer weakly. The few words, he knew them by heart now, set themselves up in his brain. They had appeared in a penny weekly, among other paragraphs, under the general heading : " All about 'Em," It read :

> " Many are the duties and diversions of great newspaper proprietors. Such men need rest when they carry on every day the cares of State. Some such find it in the flowing bowl, others at Ascot, yet others worship her whom some call Venus. And one, a little bird tells me, often deserts his mansion in Mayfair for a humble dwelling not a thousand miles from Baker Street : one at least of our great newspaper owners must plead ' guilty ' to the charge of dawdling in the Garden of Eden under the tree of Knowledge. What is that tree ? an oak ? *or can it a willow be ?* "

Then came a line of stars, under which was printed :

> " We hear that Lady Bulmer has taken for the summer a house in Fifeshire, and that, owing to pressure of business, the well-known owner of ' The Daily Gazette ' will not accompany her."

" Damn 'em ! " he said suddenly. " I'll kill him. Kill him in the right way. I'll buy up that paper within a week. I'll drive the man out and dog him for the rest of his life. If a paper employs him, I'll buy it up under his feet and kick him out. If the paper won't sell, I'll ruin it. And if the man gets out of Fleet Street, I'll tempt him until he hangs for it. . . I'll find a way."

" Please," said Janet, " please don't upset yourself like that. Yes, I know it's horrid. The world can't bear people to be friends."

" That this should happen to you ! " said Bulmer. " It's almost incredible. You ! "

She smiled. "Why shouldn't it happen to me? I'm not a goddess."

"Yes, you are."

She flushed. "Well, you're my only worshipper. But, even so, it doesn't matter. People say things, they're always saying things."

"But it does matter," said Bulmer intensely. "It does matter that you should be dragged in the mud. And it's all my fault. I suppose that if a married man is often seen alone with a woman like you, young, beautiful, charming, I suppose . . . perhaps I'd better let you alone." She did not reply. What could she say? She could not tell him to let her alone; she was too uncertain of herself to know whether she wanted him to or not. "But I can't," he added. "You're the only thing that's lovely to me in a beastly world. And I can't even sue them for libel. Even if I won, you'd lose."

She bent so close to him that he saw the various colours in her eyes. She whispered:

"I'm so sorry. I don't mean it to make any difference to us, but I'm so sorry it should matter so much to you when it matters so little to me."

"Doesn't it matter to you?" asked Bulmer, stung.

"Not at all. I am what I am. If people think otherwise they think wrong. People used to say the sun moved round the earth. It didn't. They were wrong, that's all."

"But," cried Bulmer, a little shocked, "don't you care for public opinion?"

"No, why should I? I don't care what people say about me. Indeed, I'm not sure that I don't wish they'd say worse: it would give me a chance of finding out my true friends."

"But suppose they said that you and I . . . well, some people might think so."

She met him with a brave, straight look, though colour ran down her shoulders to the edge of her blouse:

"I shouldn't care. A thing is or a thing isn't. Besides, why should I be ashamed, whatever I chose to do?" She saw his startled look, and added: "I have no morals, Lord Bulmer, in the sense of that

paragraph. I do what I think right. I abstain from what I think wrong. And I think that on balance I keep rather more commandments than the average Christian."

"But do you mean . . ." asked Bulmer, still puzzled, "that if you . . . that if a man you couldn't marry . . . and you cared for him . . ."

"Yes, of course," said Janet. "Why not? If I cared for him."

Bulmer was very shocked, but he clung to his established ideas, and rescued himself by saying:

"Oh, of course, love sanctifies."

"It does nothing of the kind," said Janet, an ill-tempered tone creeping into her voice. "Love doesn't sanctify in the way that lysol disinfects. Love happens. There's nothing holy about it, or unholy." Her irritation passed away and her voice grew soft as she cast down her eyelashes and murmured: "The only thing in the world. One knows that when one hasn't been happy." As if speaking to herself she added, in one of her rare moods of self-revelation: "Look at me, married at nineteen, a mother at twenty-three and a widow at twenty-four. It isn't long. He wasn't a bad sort. I thought I cared for him. I did, in a way . . . until I found out why he couldn't speak plainly in the evening. He hit Jack when he was six months old."

"Oh!" gasped Bulmer.

As if she had not heard him, she went on. "I oughtn't to have interfered, I suppose. Perhaps it was my fault he hit me too." In sudden rapture she added: "But that's not the end. It can't be the end. There must be something else. I know love's the only thing, though I haven't had it yet."

Unbearably unhappy, and infinitely drawn, Bulmer flung himself upon his knees before her and seized her hands.

"Darling!" he cried, "don't torture me like this. Don't you know what you are to me? I've never loved anybody, not really. I'm almost frightened to touch you, I love you so."

She looked down at him, her mouth a little twisted with uncertainty.

"Do you really care?" he whispered. "Oh, yes,

I know it's all very difficult. I'm married and not likely to be free, and all the world and its damned tongue."

" It's not that," she said, at last. " I meant what I said, but I don't know."

" Oh, don't send me away," cried Bulmer, suddenly. " Of course, you don't know. What am I after all? Forty-four! " He tried to read her then, but could not ; he was thinking only of his age and his condition. So he was surprised when she said :

" You're a great man, I know that. Only we're so different, you and I, in the way we look at things."

" I'll look at them as you do," said Bulmer. " Only tell me."

" I don't know how," she replied, freeing her hands. " You smash things. You don't care how you do it. But," she added hastily, " that doesn't matter. Only don't press me."

He hesitated for a moment : he was offended by this balking of his immediate desire. He was not used to that. But he felt gratitude and relief : after all, she was not sending him away. He bent down and covered her hands with kisses. She did not resist, and, as his lips travelled over her wrists and into the warm, scented palms of her hands, that were soft and yielding as rose flesh, she looked down upon his fair head spattered with grey, and felt together uncertain, repelled, and immensely glad. She released one hand, and for a moment let it rest on his cheek as she said : " Come and see me to-morrow at this time."

Bulmer got up. His eyes were shining, and a flush stood in his cheeks.

" Janet," he said, " I love you. You make me feel like a giant. I must do something. I must go out and conquer something."

She looked at him, smiling, amused and charmed by his youthfulness, by the material impulse into which his emotion was immediately transmuted.

The mood of conquest stayed upon him, though the weeks passed and nothing definite altered the relation. They knew a greater familiarity, a greater intimacy, and that was all. So he turned to the excitement of a plan

which had been in his mind for some months. He had been exasperated by the purchase of "The Times" by Lord Northcliffe; he should have thought of that. He had considered making an offer for "The Morning Post," then realized that to convert "The Morning Post" to Liberalism would blow off the roof of its office in Aldwych. But there was another paper in those days, called "The Day," formed only four years after "The Times." It had a great tradition, for its editor, Charles Goring, had dined out as much as Delane. And "The Day" had maintained itself from Whiggery, through Whiggery, into Whiggery. In 1914 it advocated destructive Conservatism. It had, in a way, a great position. It had had a greater one in the 'sixties, but it had not gone up with its rivals. As its circulation was only thirty thousand, and yielded small profit, it spoke for the élite. It was quoted in every foreign newspaper. Several times its proprietors had refused knighthoods and peerages.

During the century "The Day" had stayed in the hands of the Mortimer family. They were quiet people, now buried in Sussex, and ignorant of public affairs. They kept their editors until they died. When the editors died, the assistant-editors were promoted; it was left to them to find subordinates who could succeed them. Thanks to these methods, the Mortimers had grown poor; "The Day" did not make an annual loss, but contributed only a few hundreds a year to their income. They kept up the paper as a tradition. So Edward Mortimer (the fifth Mortimer, and the third Edward) was surprised when, one afternoon, a Rolls-Royce chuffed its way up the drive and a rather short, middle-aged man in one movement leapt out of the car, slammed the door, and waved the chauffeur away. Edward Mortimer had heard of Lord Bulmer, but all he knew was that he controlled a certain number of newspapers; he did not quite know which, for the only publications he read were "The Day," "The Spectator," and, in a faintly jealous spirit, "The Times." Bulmer glanced at the drawing-room, at the rich damask curtains, very shabby, at the row of silver cups won during the century by various Mortimers, at the framed picture of a Mortimer in a pith helmet sitting on an elephant,

at the horrible collection of Indian brasses. He thought : " Not very flush " ; and said : " Mr. Mortimer, I want to buy ' The Day.' "

Edward Mortimer's mouth fell open. He felt exactly as the Dean might have felt if Bulmer had asked him how much he wanted for St. Paul's. " I don't understand," said Mortimer.

" My name's Lord Bulmer. I own newspapers, but you know all about that. And I want to buy ' The Day ' from you. I want to own it, and I'm ready to pay a good price for it."

" Quite impossible," said Mortimer.

" Oh, no, nothing's impossible. Mr. Mortimer, you're a business man, I'll make you a business proposition. ' The Day ' doesn't pay. That's because in the way it's being run it's more like ' The Yesterday.' And it doesn't pay."

" I'm afraid," said Mr. Mortimer rising, " that all this is purely a private matter."

" Quite," said Bulmer, remaining seated. " To put the matter clearly, I've made a few enquiries. I understand that ' The Day ' has brought you in during the last three years an average of six hundred and eighty-six pounds a year. This half-year, I'm told, will be a little better."

" May I ask, Lord Bulmer, how you know all this ? Have you spies in my office ? "

" Yes, lots. I have some in every office, and my rivals have some in mine. Business, Mr. Mortimer ; of course, you understand."

" I'm afraid not," said Mr. Mortimer.

" No, but perhaps you'll understand me when I say that if you will sell me ' The Day,' under certain conditions of secrecy, I will pay you a hundred thousand pounds for it."

Mr. Mortimer sat down suddenly. He had not expected that. His brain, unaccustomed to figures, wondered whether a hundred thousand pounds at five per cent. brought in five thousand a year or fifty thousand a year. Anyhow, it was something terrific. He needed a new gun badly. Holland & Holland wanted forty pounds for it. Bulmer was still talking, and though Mortimer after a while tried to gain a little

time, for reasons which he could not explain, he gave in. All through the day he was worried with this idea that he ought to have had time to think about it; an instinct told him that he ought to have time. As if a century had not been enough for his family.

Mr. Mortimer, still old-maidish and protesting, was taken up to town in the Rolls-Royce, introduced to a solicitor whom he didn't know, and went out, his pocket buttoned over a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds. He accompanied Bulmer who, not wanting the news to get out, kept him company until the evening. During dinner he horrified him with a description of what he was going to do to "The Day." At half-past nine the wretched Mr. Mortimer introduced to the editor of "The Day" his new proprietor, who exhibited the deed and informed him that he would retain his services provided not a whisper of the change of proprietorship got into the other papers.

"Now," said Bulmer, "I want you to put this in." He produced from a suit-case a parcel about two feet square. "There is plenty of time to cut out the leader page and shift it somewhere else."

"Where?" asked the editor.

"Anywhere. To-morrow morning nobody will bother about the leaders in 'The Day.' People'll only look at this. Nobody knows about it. I've been careful. It's one of our own blocks. I had it enlarged by 'The Bristol Gazette.' The final photo-block was made by a small printer who thinks I'm a lunatic and doesn't know me." The three men stared for a minute at the block. It represented Lord Bulmer, and was twenty-one inches by sixteen.

"Just put that in," said Bulmer, "on the leader page. It'll just fill it. Don't say anything in the paper about the change of proprietorship. Just print under my portrait: 'The Right Hon. Lord Bulmer.' The public'll do the rest."

When, next day, Bulmer went to Janet and showed her the issue of "The Day," which she had not seen, she looked at him with large, doubtful eyes: "It's very dramatic," she said, "but——"

"But what?"

"I don't know." He caught her hand, but she

wriggled her fingers free. "I don't know. Such a big picture. It's you. It's like you, of course."

"The picture? Of course it's like me."

"No, not that. Oh, I can't explain! It's your way of doing things."

He understood her vaguely and said: "You mean it's rather blatant? Well, of course, it's a blatant world, you know. If Mohammed were to come back to earth and ride from Medina to Mecca he wouldn't get his full effect unless 'The Daily Gazette' had him timed and filmed whenever he changed donkeys."

"I suppose you're right," she said wearily. Then she smiled at him, and when he bent to kiss her hand, he murmured:

"I wanted to do something big for you." She felt pitiful tolerance and tenderness, mingled with a little fear. He was like a triumphant child that stands upon a sand-castle surrounded already by the incoming tide.

CHAPTER IV

WAR

IT was typical of Bulmer that he did not realize the war until it happened. Following on the assassination of the Archduke, he had noticed some rumours of unrest in the Balkans. But then, there always was unrest in the Balkans. " The Daily Gazette " had a correspondent in Belgrade, but his matter was seldom interesting. No good had come out of Serbia, from Bulmer's point of view, since the murder of the king and queen and the moral scandals connected with it. It took him a fortnight to grow disturbed, though the shortage of gold impressed him. But it was not until the twentieth of July, when it grew obvious that Austria wanted war, that he realized war could break out. And, even then, saturated with Liberal tradition, he looked upon a continental war as nothing more than an Imperialistic scare. Then he was seized with panic and printed an article headed : " War and Those Who Want It." In reality he was hesitating. He objected to war, not on principle, but because it did not suit him. This war was playing up to " The Morning Post " and Co. It was poaching on the peace preserves of " The Daily Gazette." But events rushed his position, and, as the mobilizations piled up, he realized that England might be in for it.

He was very thoughtful in these days, and Janet annoyed him because she was absolutely against war.

" What's the good of your being against war ? " he asked acidly, " if it's going to happen ? If a thing happens one might as well back it up as not."

They parted coldly that day. Janet knew him well enough to expect from him no stand on principle, and though he attracted her she would have preferred him

to attract her in another way. Bulmer vaguely realized this, for he did not come to see her again until after the declaration of war. An instinct bade him hide from her that his hesitation had continued until the last moment, and that, on the Sunday afternoon, not knowing for certain what the Government was going to do, he had ready two leaders; one was headed: "Our Word Is Not A Scrap Of Paper," and demanded war; the other was headed: "Don't Be Fooled," and was filled with strong pacifist sentiment and references to Anglo-German historic ties. He was informed of the ultimatum only just in time, while he was at dinner. If the information had not come through, it is probable that, following the party tradition, he would have come out pacifist. But, fortunately, he was warned, and so, next morning, his political bread and butter fell right side up. It was agony, in a way, for during the whole week he had been through his ordinary route in continual touch with the Cabinet. But he oscillated, for one moment sided with Lord Morley and Mr. John Burns; then swung over to the virulence of Mr. Churchill. Bulmer's true agony lay in the fact that he could not follow the middle party of Mr. Asquith and Sir Edward Grey; he could side only with excess. But when war broke out a sudden ease came over him. He was enormously excited. Things were going to happen. One didn't know what things, but never mind. He did not sleep through the Monday night; he spent febrile hours at "The Daily Gazette" office, or rushed in his car about the wakeful town; the processions and the cheers made him drunk. Through the next day, too, he was in the grasp of drama, filled with a sense of incredible forces unleashed and launched at each other; he was as a valkyr in a storm, mingling his laughter with the thunder peals, and dazzling his eyes with lightning. He rushed into Janet's flat, and his eyes were so feverish, there was such rapture in his parted lips, that for a moment he terrified Janet and delighted her. He seemed big.

"Isn't it splendid!" he cried hoarsely. "Isn't it wonderful!" and, for the first time, seized her in his arms. He crushed her to him, and, bending back her

head, kissed the cool lips. He was wild, he was conquering, and for some seconds, so distraught was she too, so broken by what she thought catastrophe, that she did not resist him. Such weariness fell on her, that indeed she came closer to him, suffering caresses she did not expect. It was as if she felt alone in a hostile world, and was glad to be ground and beaten through her own body as well as through her thoughts. Still holding her, he raised his head and looked into the emptiness, talked for a long time. His brain was fumous ; his speech was a lyrical song of slaughter. In mangled sentences he expressed ideas newborn, aspirations to honour for his country that was actually an aspiration to deeds. He grew breathless, his mouth was dry. He was in the grasp of an epic poem. But, at last, holding her so, limp and abandoned, she grew more personal to him. At first it had been as if he grasped heroic mankind, but now he was conscious of her softness, of her surrender to him. He felt still upon his lips the sweetness of her mouth, and a suavity arose from the piled brown hair, the soft cheeks. A languid grace that fired him came from the long, warm body held close in his arms.

" Oh, it's good to hold you on such a day ! It makes one triumphant. England's triumphant. I'm triumphant." Holding her close, he pressed upon her lips kisses that frightened her, so dominant were they. But he held her so tight that she could only struggle. His voice sank to whispers as he protested his love for her.

" Don't," she said weakly. He was a war god. He drew her and he sickened her.

But, as if he had not heard, he held her, hoarsely murmuring, in this universal dissolution, warring against her impulse to refuse herself.

" No, no," she cried, this time with a note of terror in her voice. And as suddenly he grew rough and silent, as she grew conscious that in a moment his growing excitement would sweep away all the respect that had held him back, that the times were times of tragedy, when naught save respect is evil, her instinctive fastidiousness asserted itself. So, in silence, muscle against muscle, teeth clenched, they fought each

other, hard-breathing, giving forth the muffled cries of effort.

" Let me go," said Janet, a snarl in her voice. She clutched at her hair that was loosening, and pressed her other hand against his chin, bending him back as an arc.

" Janet . . . you're mine." Still she struggled, throwing all her weight against his throat. Suddenly they fell apart, in full reaction. In their weakness, shame crept on both. They looked at each other for a moment, still breathing fast. Tremulously he watched her pick up her combs from the sofa, and he observed the flush of anger on her cheeks.

" I'm sorry," he said at last.

She had her back to him then, and as she turned there was in her face such contempt, such anger, as if she hated him for having thought that war could gain for him a victory that love had not yet granted. But when she said : " Go away," he turned and went very fast, as if he feared she might do him an injury.

Bulmer did not long have time to dwell upon this sudden and awful emptiness. His separation from Janet, for she went to the country the next day and did not answer his letters, told him that he had not been mistaken, that at last he had found love, only to lose it. For some days the agony of his loss would not leave him. He made schoolboy plans. He would discover her, go to her, wait at her door till she came out, abase himself in the dust, and so stay until in forgiveness she raised him up. But she had left no address, as if she were determined for a time to cut out of her life the period he had filled. One day he thought : " Suppose she never comes back again." He tried to believe that this was a ridiculous idea, but, still, who could say ? He tried to imagine life without the hope of her. Then he told himself quietly : " If she doesn't come back I'll shoot myself." It was not despair drove him, but rather the sense of emptiness. He would take his life, not through grief, but through lack of incentive to live.

But the times were not propitious to unrequited love. Notably, he had to follow a policy so difficult that it took all his energy. He had to support the war in the Government sense : to help to win it, but not

win it too much. He had to range himself on the side of combat and yet satisfy his Liberal and Nonconformist public, who came into the war as sulky schoolboys to school. Also he had to be careful not to agree with Northcliffe, and as he actually did agree it became a whole-time occupation to find means to quarrel with "The Daily Mail."

"We've got to pitch into them," he said to Alford, desperately. "That's what we're for. If we stop hitting people, the public'll think we've lost our guts."

It was very difficult, for "The Daily Gazette" mind demanded that he should immediately press for a strict blockade, the expansion of the air service, and conscription. He managed to attack "The Daily Mail" on the subject of Lord Kitchener. Unfortunately he had no other candidate, in spite of his fondness for Marshal French. But French was hardly a popular figure, and so, grudgingly, Bulmer had to follow "The Daily Mail." And he was in acute difficulties with the Government; his rapid evolution from Liberalism into a sort of warlike Radicalism was swifter than theirs. He found them obstructive; they wouldn't tell him things. When Bulmer was refused information he invariably became dangerous. He did not necessarily want to publish, but he wanted to know. It was this, no doubt, caused him the day after Mons to print an article signed by himself, surmounted by a headline which went right across the page, and reading:

"THIS GOVERNMENT WANTS MORE ZIP."

It was just like the old days, and as the memory of his parting with Janet grew less painful, as he was able to hope more because no greater evil followed, a youthful joy invaded Bulmer. He began to give the Government "Zip." He enjoyed even the Government's anger: when the ordinary route called at Shoe Lane and told him that he heard that the Government was much annoyed, Bulmer merely replied:

"I can't help it; they won't do what I tell 'em. I've no use for a disobedient Prime Minister. Look at this conscription business! The mugs have missed their chance. They could have had conscription on the

fourth of August for the price of sticking a proclamation outside the Royal Exchange. Now the country's had time to get cool, and, mark my words, it'll be two years before the Government hots 'em up again. The men'll have to be whipped with scorpions before they come in, and it'll be a pretty lesson to those shufflers in Downing Street who think they're going to entice five million men into the army by trailing down Oxford Street a tin of bully beef tied to a string. But I'll show 'em."

He did. On the 26th of August he was able to announce in all "The Daily Gazettes" that he had dismissed every man under thirty-eight. It was a *coup*, and Bulmer did not hesitate to urge every employer to dismiss all men under this age. He countered the Mons angels and the pathos of Mr. Harold Begbie ("I wasn't among the first to go, but I went, thank God, I went!") by a flaming appeal to the grey-beards of England, and the offer of a prize of five thousand pounds to the firm who dismissed within one month the highest proportion of men of military age.

He was happy in a way. He enjoyed even England's agony; he enjoyed the retreat from Mons, though it filled him with fear, and though he stood for a time on the Embankment on the Sunday afternoon, holding in frozen horror the afternoon editions of "The Observer" and "The Times." "Can the British Army be saved?" he murmured, and vaguely felt that it would be dramatic if it could not be saved. Then, at the office, somebody told him of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, and he forgot the drama in violent efforts to get through on the telephone to a professor of Greek at Oxford who was to write for next day a parallel between Xenophon leading his soldiers from the Tigris and Marshal French making for Le Cateau.

Also he continued to press for conscription. People told him that there was no equipment, that if the men came in they couldn't be housed, that there were no tents in France. Bulmer did not care; he hated details. Having begun to cry out he could not stop. His policy amounted to hiccups. Also he was at a low point of mental balance. He was fighting the Northcliffe press on the internment of enemies, and was clamouring for deportations. The liberal strain of humanitarianism

forced itself into this policy, but Bulmer could not breathe on these high levels; almost at once he converted the humanitarianism into a campaign of placards and cartoons. He began by asking for fair treatment for enemy aliens who had done no harm; he ended by a mock article by a British convict, protesting against internment on the plea that the Hun would foul our loyal jails.

Also he maintained his campaign for the extension of the Air Service, and put up a five thousand pound prize for the firm who built a fleet of one hundred aeroplanes in the quickest time. Day by day the entries were published, and, with splendid audacity, "The Daily Gazette" accepted the entry of a German firm located in Holland. As he put it in the leaderette which flaunted this fact: "We'll take our 'planes from the devil himself; it's to fight the devil that we want them."

Perhaps because his hardness reacted against the sentimentality with which the Belgian refugees were received, he set up a demand for forced labour for the Belgians, and enjoyed the shocked anger with which this proposal was received. Then he tried to find something else; he wanted to do something more. Anything, provided it was more. It was agony to him to be in England then, in an England good-tempered and sleepy, failing to hate properly, and practising "business as usual." At forty-four he could not take a commission, so he precipitated himself into France, and drove the Rolls-Royce up and down behind the front, talking to people who at once realized that he must be a lunatic or an Englishman. Everything was slow, even the war; the only satisfaction was the great fleet of "Daily Gazette" ambulances which he had presented and himself shipped three days after the declaration. He came across a countess, and for some days conducted with her an unsatisfactory intrigue. He packed her in the car among the growing heaps of telegrams and reports, tinned provisions, and thermos flasks. Their emotional intercourse occupied hectic moments between telephone calls and interviews at G.H.Q. with polite subalterns who thought her pretty and him bad form. Then, one morning, the French removed the countess

from the car, tried her as a spy in the afternoon, and shot her next morning. Bulmer was advised to go home as his passport was no longer valid.

The affair made no noise, but fearing that suspicion might unjustly fall upon him, Bulmer was driven into a greater bellicose fury. If they thought him shaky, he'd show 'em. His only fear was that Janet would be told, and, in his despair, he sent to the flat a long letter full of self-reproach and self-abasement. He felt that he could not explain how much he loved and needed her, and that it was she had driven him, in his loneliness, in his agony, to such a companionship. But this letter, too, remained unanswered.

CHAPTER V

THE FURIES

SOMETIMES, between preoccupations, Bulmer thought: "Am I forgetting her?" Five months had elapsed, and no letters had passed between him and Janet. Often he would throw himself back in his chair and call up her features. At first this was a day-dream full of exquisite melancholy. Then it grew dimmer. A little of the vividness fled from the cheeks of the wraith, and he was less assured of the shapely hands which he had held. He found the memory less ardent when he remembered that he had pressed her lips. Only the grey-green eyes remained eloquent, mocking, sorrowful.

He wondered what would happen when they met again. For of course they would meet again. She would not always stay in the country. And when she came back? He played the drama of their conversation. She would say: "How do you do, Lord Bulmer?" Then, after a pause: "What a pity it's so hot." Or wet, or something equally distant. But, though he was thus ready for her, the actual meeting came upon him as a shock. It happened at a lunch party where he arrived a little late. He sat down to find himself meeting her eyes across the table. At once he knew that he was afraid. If only he could have spoken to her, heard her say that it was (as it happened) very cold, then he would have known what she felt for him. But now he must face her for an hour after exchanging pallid smiles of recognition. He watched her through lunch. She seemed more lovely because she was more strange. Cheerful, too, and a little thrill of hatred ran through him because she laughed very often when her neighbour, a young naval officer, said things in an undertone. He

wondered whether they were laughing at him. People did, he knew. So, in the drawing-room, he was ready to be curt, and as he came near, did not know whether he wanted to bend his knee before her or say something rude. It was she spoke, in the cool, high voice that to him was song :

" How do you do ? " she said. Then, " I suppose the war's keeping you very busy."

His heart softened. After all, she was being personal, and, in a rush of emotion, instead of answering her he said, in a whisper :

" I'm glad to see you again. It's been hell, hell."

She did not reply for a moment, but flushed. She did not know what to say, not only because she felt he was telling the truth, but because she was incredibly sorry for him. It was something else troubled her, a sudden pang. She told herself : " He mustn't be hurt." And, as she noticed that he was much thinner and that his eyes burnt, she asked herself, with a little terror, whether indeed she loved him, this gross child, this vulgarian who might have genius ; whether he was melting in the crucible of his love the lustrous pearl of her coldness.

" Hell ! hell ! " he said again. Janet clenched her hands together. She must answer him. But she hated outward emotion. Though, in that moment, she wanted to cry out : " Well, then, come back if that's heaven." Instead, she said, lightly :

" How you exaggerate . . . Dick." His eyes grew so soft and humble as she spoke his name that she added : " You can take me home in the car if you like. No, not yet. Decency forbids that one should leave a lunch party before three."

In her flat, a little later, they arrived at vague understandings. She stopped him when he begged her forgiveness :

" No, don't talk about it, that's all over. Talk of something else, as you used to. What are you doing for the war ? How long is it going to last ? "

" Four or five years," said Bulmer, obediently. " There's more kick in the Hun than we bargained for. He nearly licked us at Ypres the other day. Nearly went clean through. Oh, I know it didn't get into the

papers, not even into 'The Daily Gazette.' But I know. I've seen a wire from the commander of the eighth Jaegers to the Great H.Q. saying: 'Think it unwise advance further. British yielding so rapidly that trap certain. Are we to advance against obvious curtain of machine guns?' The reply clearly told them not to advance. The Germans couldn't believe we were such damn fools as to go into this war armed with fountain-pen-fillers and tin-openers."

"Is it really as bad as that?" asked Janet.

"Worse, I expect. Even I don't know everything. But it won't last, I tell you, it won't last. There's going to be a change in this country. We've got the wrong men at the head. The Honourable Johnnie at the F.O., and Colonel Blownin in the War Office. They won't last. This isn't the Hundred Years War; it's a business war, and it needs business men. It ought to be run by Joseph Lyons, and Selfridge's. I'll show 'em."

"What will you show 'em?" asked Janet, smiling at his old intensity.

"'The Daily Gazette' is going to put in quite another sort of man, people who know something about shipping into the Admiralty instead of people who know something about the fox-trot. I'm going to put in the right people—railway men, bankers, factory managers, people with some drive, people with some Zip."

"Dick," she said, laughing fondly at this baby building empires as a house of cards, "you're incorrigible."

He did not notice her fondness. He was too intent. He went on: "The world's rotten to the core. It's betrayed from the top. Immingham! I know things about Lord Immingham which ought to get him hanged. Do you know why we've no machine guns? With French howling and screaming for machine guns? Because Lord Immingham doesn't believe in 'em. He says that Waterloo was won with rifles. Good God! I wish he'd been at Waterloo, but I'll show 'em. I'm only just waiting for Lord Immingham."

"Surely," said Janet, seriously, "you wouldn't dare to attack the man who . . ."

"Yes, I know. I shouldn't care if he'd won so many

battles that he'd doubled the Empire. For I tell you that the general who doubles the Empire yesterday will halve it to-morrow. And as for dare! Don't you dare me! I'm glad he's a big one: he'll make a bigger bang when he comes down." She did not know what to say. He frightened and excited her. Indeed, he would dare. She wondered what would happen if one day he thought that the King would make a big bang if he came down. With a man like that you couldn't tell. But his intensity disturbed her: it was so racking, so she stopped him, and was flattered to find that he obeyed her emotional call, just as he had obeyed the intellectual. She said:

"Dick, you must go now. I've got a tea party coming on in a few minutes, all women. You wouldn't like that."

She gave him her hand and after a hesitation he laid upon her fingers tremulous kisses. As he went down the stairs he thought: "It's all right. As if nothing had happened." He did not wonder why Janet had forgiven him, did not even ask himself whether she had come to love him. That might come later, and the present sufficed to the present. All he knew was that he felt strong and victorious; half an hour later, when he called Alford, Benson, and Singleton into conference, he was vigorous and assured:

"Listen," he said. "I want you to prepare the ground about . . . machine guns. I can't tell you yet what's going to be done about them. Just now I want you, Benson, to get hold of the facts: What was the establishment of machine guns before the war in England and in Germany. How many we ordered in July '14; how many ordered since; how many delivered per month. And, Singleton, you might tackle the inspection side, see how many have been passed and how many rejected. Might raise a stink against the Enfield Small Arms Company. And, I think, Alford, you might start gently with leaderettes, talking about machine guns. We want to create an atmosphere of suspicion, you know. The usual gathering storm. Don't say anything, but go on hinting. And when we're ready, then it's up Jenkins with . . . but I'll tell you later."

The office was rather excited until March. When

the boss hid facts they must indeed be frightful. Day by day he led "The Gazette," beginning gently with references to the value of the machine gun ; he passed on to the advantage it gave the Germans ; then by degrees came shocking stories of massacres of British battalions by two machine guns and half a dozen German gunners. He saw with pleasure that public opinion was disturbed. A question was asked in the House and met as usual with the reply that a statement would be against the public interest. When the matter began to be raised in his presence at lunch parties, and when at last a meeting was called by the Young Tories to appoint a deputation to see the Premier, Bulmer realized that he must strike. He did so with dramatic swiftness. He did not tell his staff until only a few minutes were left to spare. They were frightened, but nobody resisted, and, next morning, the headline and the placards said all over England :

"LORD IMMINGHAM MUST GO."

The sensation was immediate, and a cry of fury arose. The next day brought letters from seven thousand subscribers of "The Daily Gazette" to cancel their subscriptions, but it also brought an access of circulation of two hundred and ten thousand, which, subject to swaying fortune, ended by almost maintaining itself. The only person who seemed unmoved was Lord Immingham. People hardly dared talk to him about it. When at last two old comrades ventured to sympathize, Immingham quietly took a cigar from his case, bit off the end and spat it into the fire-place. He did nothing more to the end of the conversation. But the Cabinet felt less secure : Bulmer terrified them : if he attacked Immingham he would not hesitate to attack them, and, as the war was not going very well, they couldn't risk it. The rest is commonplace history, and, week by week, Bulmer could record with exultation the increase in the supply of machine guns. He was honestly glad for his country's sake. He desperately wanted those guns, pregnant with victory, but he also enjoyed his power. And it was in all sincerity that, six months later, he headed a leaderette : "Alone I did

it." He had enjoyed himself entirely, and he had never been afraid. Once Janet asked him whether he did not realize that he might have been prosecuted under D.O.R.A. Bulmer laughed and said :

" Jailing me would have been a noisy affair."

But his mood with Janet now was less and less easy ; between violent attempts at caresses which she half-repelled, interposed his growing excitement. Sometimes he would not sit down, but for half an hour at a time paced about the drawing-room, his voice husky and his eyes injected, smelling danger, spitting defiance. The shortage of machine guns led him to think that all other perils were equally neglected. He was still clamouring for the deportation of aliens, demanding that policemen should have power to stop anybody in the street and make them say " Thief " ; any man who slurred the " th " to sail for Holland. Often he ended in incoherence :

" Government ! Dutch barbers ! . . . Dutch spies ! Spies ! The blockade is a sieve, a damn sieve. We're feeding the Germans ! feeding 'em ! And there are some find their profit in it. They're trading with the enemy, drawing in German gold. German gold is being poured over the country ! A man with a foreign accent called to see me and missed me the day before. There you are ! what could he want ? "

" But they couldn't bribe *you*," said Janet.

He did not listen. In his red dream no island of sweet reason emerged. He was so excited that she led him to Primrose Hill to compel him to take the air, to try to quieten him. But he waved his fist at London in her sleepy hollow ; to him London stank with corruption only less evilly than with slackness. He gripped Janet's hand carelessly. He did not know how close to him she was that day, so stricken was she by fear for his sanity.

Indeed, he was now but half-responsible. He was ready to attack or defend without investigation, and in this nervous state any avenue seemed safe, any man might prove a saviour. It was thus that he made Mr. Digby, a steel manufacturer and member for a northern constituency. He met Digby at a banquet and was impressed, not only by his quiet ferocity, by his passion

for excess, but by a trick of speech. Whenever Digby made a statement he added: "That's number one." To the next statement he added: "That's number two." He went on: "The conclusion is this. And that's number three." Bulmer immediately grew enthusiastic over this logical business man and proclaimed him "The Man." Having declared him "The Man," he forced Digby into swift popularity. He sent "The Man" to address meetings at Albert Hall; he reported him *in extenso*. He cartooned him, jackbooted, and kicking out Mr Asquith. Then Mr. Digby was given a new office, created for the purpose of keeping Bulmer quiet, and within a few weeks became ignoble. Being in power he could do no good. One morning, five trawlers were sunk outside Dover, and "The Man," became "The Worm." Bulmer slew him by means of leaders in "The Day," and cartoons in "The Gazette." Then he sought another Man. This setting up and pulling down of men was, in Bulmer, half-hysteria, half-caprice. He was entirely successful, but he was at the mercy of impression. Thus, as soon as he had a new impression he needed a new Man. And when "The Man" ceased to be "The Man" he never forgave him. There was about Bulmer a good deal of Warwick the King Maker, and nothing of General Monk. His newspapers were sensational because he was sensational. When he led them they excited him and made him more sensational. Now he was coursing the town in a Rolls-Royce that was never fast enough, to the echo of the yells of his newsboys, who terrified him with his own news. During that time, Janet so pitied him that she thought she loved him. For she had discovered in him a constructive strain. One day he said to her:

"When this war's done, there's going to be a different England. I wish I had the building of it."

"How would you build it?"

"No more small farms and small holdings, but great grain farms with cornfields twenty miles long, and electric ploughs to make the furrows. In the middle of the farm a model village with bathrooms electric light, telephones, local clubs, local theatres, local libraries, local dancing-halls, swimming baths hot and cold. And everybody would have their place in it.

Uniform if possible, the labourers to be privates, the foremen sergeants, the managers to have commissions. Railways with slip coaches to drop the produce at every small town, or better, a moving carpet all round England that'd never stop at all. Send your letters by aeroplane. And lay out your towns properly. Cut all the streets at right angles and call them by their numbers. Have a store every five hundred yards exactly, and a public house every half mile. Order, we want order. We want the shop at the corner to be the tailor, the next the butcher, the next the grocer, the next the barber, and so on. All over the town, all over the country, all over the world. Same language in London and Abyssinia. Same sort of shirt along the same latitude. Food to be regulated according to temperature. No more coal, no more gas. Make everything electric. No more washing-up: press a button and scald. No more washing floors, but make 'em of vulcanized cardboard and peel off a sheet when it's dirty. And no more of those fanciful local variations. I'm for democracy, I am. Divide Africa and Asia into County Councils. And those into Borough Councils, and so on. Janet, there'll come a day when, at the same time, the same lesson, in the same language, will be dictated to every child in every class in the whole world, little boys in Bath and little niggers in the Cameroons. Of course," he added, regretfully, " they'd still be black and white. Still, one might alter the marriage law. One might average up."

She smiled. She did not know that he could conceive Utopia.

CHAPTER VI

LORD IMMINGHAM

"I MUST go," said Bulmer. Then, after a pause, as if this slightly flattered him: "I'm going to see Lord Immingham."

"Oh!" said Janet, "that'll be interesting."

"Yes." Then, hurriedly, so that she might not discern a certain nervousness in his voice: "If they think they're going to bully me they'll find out they're mistaken. I'll show 'em. Immingham! Old elastic-sided jackboot! I'll tweak his nose, tweak it."

Janet smiled. She liked him best when thus in ebullition. She understood that some disagreement must lie between Bulmer and Lord Immingham. So she said lightly:

"Well, I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself. I suppose he wants to scold you."

"Scold me!" said Bulmer, opening the door. "We'll see about that. Of course, I know he's tough in his way. Not like going to see other people, like Churchill blinded with his own limelight. I'm rather surprised they didn't turn the Premier on to me. He settle strikes, he smacks the faces of the Lords, he busts up the land system, he's the maid of all dirty work. Still . . . I'll tell you all about it to-morrow."

In fact, Bulmer did not give Janet complete details of his interview, because it was not entirely satisfactory. It had an inconclusive quality. At six o'clock, after waiting less than a minute, he was shown into a large room where, behind a shabby desk, sat a solidly built man with a long body, who, seated, seemed tall. The unsmiling figure shook his hand without rising, and, looking elsewhere, indicated a seat. Then, Lord Immingham fastened upon him a fishy stare. Bulmer

had heard of this characteristic and met his eyes with a hostile glitter. He thought: "You want to stare me down, do you? Well, we'll see." And so for a moment they faced each other. Seconds passed, and Bulmer grew conscious that the effort was greater than he had expected. The soldier was looking at him, neither inviting him to speak, nor as if meditating over him, nor as if he disliked him. He looked at him as if he were not looking at him. It was irritating, and Bulmer found his lips twitching with the words he wanted to utter. But he held himself down, and still Lord Immingham stared at him as if he had all eternity before him. Bulmer did not move and at last scored, for Lord Immingham, in a tired way, remarked:

"This sort of thing. You know. Can't go on. Damn nuisance."

"What sort of thing do you refer to?" asked Bulmer with elaborate politeness. As Lord Immingham did not reply, he forgot how he should handle him and burst out: "If you mean that you dislike references to yourself and your policy in the papers, well, I'll tell you at once that my papers can't be bought, and my papers can't be bullied."

Lord Immingham gave no indication that this was what he meant, so Bulmer, very uncomfortable, went on:

"Of course I know perfectly well that Government departments don't want unfavourable news printed until they're so stale that nobody wants to read 'em. I suppose you want to impose a censorship. Well, you've got one, you've got the Press Bureau." As Lord Immingham said nothing, Bulmer grew unwise and added truculently: "The Press Bureau! I wipe my boots on it."

After a moment, Lord Immingham, as if he wanted to save time, said:

"Your papers get in the way. That machine gun business, for instance."

"Oh!" said Bulmer, "I thought as much. Well, Lord Immingham, you won't deny we were very short of machine guns, and that if I hadn't been there to ginger up the country we'd be short of 'em still. It's the business of the papers to keep the Government

up to date and to keep things humming, while the Government's job is to keep out of date and to keep comfortable."

"I know all about that," said Immingham. "Not your job at all. Your job's to get advertisements for your papers and make money."

Upon this Bulmer lost his temper. The suggestion was deeply offensive. He felt himself in the presence of a man to whom the press represented a trade and not a sacerdoce. For some time he lectured Lord Immingham on the value of the press, its educational powers, its capacity for banding men together in the pursuit of a common cause. All through, Lord Immingham stared at him as if he were thinking of something else. Then he said:

"We don't want the press. Makes talk. Country's all talk."

"Talk moulds the world," said Bulmer, "and I tell you, Lord Immingham, that if I have too much nonsense from this Government I won't advertise their damn war."

Lord Immingham looked unmoved, probably aware that the war would go on all the same. So Bulmer grew angrier:

"It's all very well coming along and trying to hector me, and bully me, telling me what I ought to say and what I ought not to say. There's lots I could have said that'd have put the Government in Queer Street: what did you people do when French was retiring after Mons and screaming aloud for material to replace what he'd lost? Nothing. You just gave out that everything had been replaced. Instead of sending out guns and transport that you hadn't got, you gave the country a dose of Mother-Seigel's Soothing Syrup. I could have raised the roof off this building if I'd chosen to print the truth. And it will be printed one day, when French tells the world why Haig stepped into his shoes. Perhaps it won't be written till you're dead, but it won't make you a pretty monument."

"I'm not talking about that," said Immingham, after a long pause. Then, with a rare flash of irony: "It's not like you, Lord Bulmer, to talk of something that happened over a year ago. Out of date you know."

This easy taunt stung Bulmer, and, suddenly espousing in public the munitions campaign which Lord Northcliffe had captured under his nose, he began to threaten. As he talked, he knew that he hated this obstinate, cold personage who sat there listening to him as if he did not want to hear him. He got up to talk more freely, and circled about his adversary. Immingham followed him with his eyes, massive, careless. It was elephant versus tiger, and so far the elephant refused to do more than watch his active antagonist. When Bulmer stopped, Immingham said: "I'm not going to be bullied about. If your papers don't toe the line within a week, we'll put D.O.R.A. on to you."

"Oh," said Bulmer, "is that the idea? Well, let me point out that you won't D.O.R.A. me so easily as you think. To begin with you can't take me into a police court. I'm a peer. You'll have to try me in the House of Lords, and I can tell you, Lord Immingham, that that'll make more noise than the whole of your damned artillery."

Then, for the first time, Lord Immingham smiled, a very slow, gradual smile, and said:

"Wouldn't dream of trying you. Pop you into the Tower. Plenty of time to try you when the war's done."

Bulmer also smiled, and suddenly felt immensely superior to this simple, stockish soldier. He felt sorry for Lord Immingham, who was unable to realize what public opinion meant, and, above all, did not understand the cowardice of his fellow-ministers. For the first time he understood the stupidity of this great figure, who had gained his position by inactivity, by carelessness of the feelings of others, by immense freedom from emotion. He had become superior through his own inferiority. He had mastered men because he had never tried to understand them, and so had made no weakening allowances for their temperaments. He had seen the world in terms of correspondence between Q.M.G. 2 and Q.M.G. 4. He had moved men as he shifted ballast. His inhumanity had mastered their humanity. He had rigged himself high on his ignorance and had imposed his worn-out ideas by disdaining to state them. For a long time

Bulmer had hated Immingham, his childish brutality, his intolerance that transcended optimism and pessimism, his incapacity to harbour either, his extremism, that arose from inability to conceive the extreme. He saw that Lord Immingham's high confidence was made up of heavy disdain for all men.

. So he got up and said : " Well, there's nothing to add. I'll do what I choose, and you'll do what you choose. And one thing you won't do is to put a muzzle on me. I've got everything I want : money, power, rank. Now I'm enjoying the great luxury : the right to tell the truth." As Lord Immingham did not indicate any further emotion, Bulmer felt he must attack him, shake him, compel him to show temper, to show something. So he grew personal. " I wonder what you thought could be the result of this. I wonder whether you've consulted your colleagues, and whether the Cabinet, in despair of talking me over by sending me young William, have put you on to me to frighten me. You won't frighten me, Lord Immingham. You'll only irritate me. And two can play at frightening. I made Digby, I can unmake Digby, I can unmake you. I can do a good deal one way or another for your future, which is as uncertain as that of all men."

Lord Immingham got up and replied ; " All men's future is uncertain until they are hanged," shook Bulmer's hand, and sat down again at his desk, where he busied himself with folders full of minutes. The interview was finished.

CHAPTER VII

SPATE

"WILL your lordship see Lady Bulmer?"

"Oh, what?" Then instinct told him to be casual, and swiftly he realized that he could not afford to refuse to see her. So, in a careless tone that concealed savagery: "Show her in." He had not seen Vi for two years, and though he was enraged by her audacity, he was curious of her. She was the past. When she came in her attitude was half-cringing, half-defiant. As if she knew that she was trying to force his hand and was not quite sure that she could do it.

"How much do you want?" he asked. While she hesitated, he surveyed her. She had grown rather older in those two years; now she looked forty-nine, though her hair shone with a peculiar blackness. There was a touch of blue in the dye. But round the fine eyes ran a little webbing of wrinkles, and the skin of the cheeks, rather loose, was running down into the looser flesh of the neck. She was rather stouter, too, and though dressed with heavy smartness, she was displeasing. One could guess that her legs were too thick.

"Want?" she said. Then, with a hesitant smile: "How you do put things, Dick! I was passing, I just thought I'd come in and see you. Can't a woman come and see her husband now and then, even if they haven't always got on?"

"How much do you want?"

She flushed, and an honest expression of regret crossed her face. She did not love him, but they had never exactly quarrelled. What had she done? she wondered. So she said:

" Please don't talk to me like that. I've done you no harm. I've kept out of your way all these years. Of course it's been lonely. A woman alone, you know."

" Please don't be sentimental, and tell me how much you want."

" I don't want anything," said Vi, getting up with as much dignity as her weight would allow. " Only I think it's a pity you and I should go on like this. We're not as young as we were. We began life so happily, and . . ." he watched her, determined not to help her. . . " we're getting on in years." As he said nothing she ceased to manœuvre : " Dick, won't you take me back ? "

" Why should I ? We've done very well without each other."

" You used to love me. At least, you said you did. Perhaps it was my fault. Perhaps I didn't give you all you wanted."

He looked at her more gently. He remembered that he had loved her in the way in which she understood love. She had been violently desirable ; she had given him the first sombre glimpses of passion. But she had never crowned with a garland of roses the dancing satyr of her animalism.

" My poor old Vi," he said ; " I'm sorry, but it's no good. One doesn't do at forty-nine what one failed to do at twenty-nine. Perhaps one doesn't do it when one's twenty-nine, but one believes one does. Illusion, you know. And one doesn't get illusion twice."

For a moment the dark woman hesitated ; then a rush of blood coloured her dark cheeks brick, and she said in a low voice :

" Oh, doesn't one ? Some people do. A little bird told me that it looks as if you had."

" What do you mean ? "

" What I say," said Vi, smoothly.

Then as Bulmer, maddened by this bromide, banged the table, she added : " I'm not so cut off as you think. I hear things. What'd you say if I was to go and see Mrs. Willoughby ? "

Bulmer jumped up, and she shrank away from the fury in his eyes.

" Oh," he said, " that's your little game ! How dare you mention her name, the sweetest, the loveliest of all ! "

" Dare ! " cried Vi, angered by this praise of her rival. " That's a fine word to use to your wife. What would there be extraordinary if your wife was to call on one of her husband's dearest friends ? I've half a mind to divorce you."

" Well, do it," said Bulmer. " I asked you to long ago. Go on, divorce me, I'll give you cause. I'll knock your head off for you if you need any cruelty."

He looked so threatening that she stepped back. As he did not follow her, she began to mouth threats. She'd call on Mrs. Willoughby. She'd give her some sweetest and some loveliest of all. She'd expose him. She'd make him the talk of the town. As she grew shrill he interrupted her :

" Look here, I've had enough of this. Another word and I cut off your allowance. Oh, yes, I know ! It's settled on you, but it'll take you time to get it. You shall sue me for it every time, and I'll have six K.C.'s on the job to find out ways to make the law still slower than it is. And if you go near Mrs. Willoughby, if you call on her, write to her, telephone her, or send anybody to her, if to my knowledge you dare to think of her, I'll do things to you. Quiet, nasty, criminal things." He stepped forward and she stepped back. " I'll do secret things to you, like the Chinese tortures in the magazines." Still terrified, she receded before him, and, as he stepped forward again, with a little cry, she turned and ran out of the room.

Bulmer returned to his desk, pressed a button. When Moss came in, he said : " Has Mr. Alsager been waiting a long time ? Show him in, anyhow."

Alsager had, for the last ten days, been The Man. He was a wall-paper manufacturer in a large way of business, but was then filling for the benefit of his country a high position in the Ministry of Food. Bulmer met him at lunch at the House of Commons, where he had gone to meet Digby. Alsager sharply contrasted with Digby ; while Digby for every possible reason fumed and bellowed, seeing spies everywhere, and demanding the execution of U boat crews, Alsager,

with his heavy jaw, his small, acquisitive eyes, his impassive quality, recalled Lord Immingham. He let Bulmer talk for a long time of compulsory rationing, which Bulmer was violently booming. Bulmer had gone so far as to put up a board outside Upper Brook Street, on which, every day, he posted a bill showing the number of adults in the house and the number of ounces of meat, sugar, and tea consumed. When he had done Alsager replied :

" I know. I've had the books printed."

" Oh, have you ! You're sure rationing's coming, then ? "

" No. But I don't pay for the books, and I'm ready for rationing when it comes."

" Oh, we'll put it through ! " said Bulmer gaily. " We want the lowest rations we can get, not the highest. The less food a man gets, the more tragic he'll feel and the more he'll feel he's doing something in the war. So I'm glad you've got ready for the emergency."

" There are no emergencies," said Alsager solidly. " Not if you forsee them."

Alsager was an immense success ; he had the right kind of face for success, an air of resolution that was merely obstinacy, eyes that looked cautious because they were callous ; he said drastic things because he was unable to realize anybody else's point of view. He became the first of Bulmer's business men, whom, immediately after the fall of Mr. Asquith, he decided to force upon the Government. He had three more favourites, Sir Charles Hamerton, head of a jam combine, Mr. Edgeworth, who controlled large rolling mills at Dudley, and a Scotch stockbroker called Douglas. Day after day, Bulmer collected details of Civil Service delay and inefficiency, and set them up in the form of tales with a moral. The most successful was the story of the dispatch by the War Office of sand-boxes to go with motor-cars for the purpose of putting out fires. These were sent to Egypt. Bulmer a little later discovered that the painstaking War Office, wishing to overlook nothing, had sent to Egypt with the boxes several tons of sand. The moral ran, " We want Sir Charles Hamerton to sweep the dusty cobwebs from

the antique nooks and crannies of Whitehall, which for centuries have been left unswept, by Mr. Putitoff and Mr. Passiton."

For Bulmer, with the assistance of Tick, had created a large tribe of Civil Servants, among whom were not only Mr. Putitoff and Mr. Passiton, but also Mr. Shuffle, Miss Squirm, Miss Flapperty and Lord Snooze. Very often the entire menagerie was mobilized for a single cartoon: Alsager, Hamerton, and the rest were generally got up as St. Georges in armour, puncturing Mr. Shuffle, while Mr. Passiton vainly gnawed their armoured legs. Douglas, having revolted one day, was encouraged by being represented as St. Anthony resisting temptation personified by Miss Flapperty. Bulmer was enjoying himself enormously, not only because every morning and afternoon he could bellow with laughter and slap his thighs over the cartoon, but because he was succeeding. Posts had been found for all his champions, and he really believed in his business government. He harboured an honest hatred of the Civil Service, and though he grew more hopeful when Mr. Lloyd George became Premier, he had suffered terror when Serbia was crushed; his mind magnified every small evidence of inefficiency. His Liberal faith was now half-forgotten. He was glad of the Coalition, because it exempted him from supporting a party: he was not good at supporting. And he was glad of the Coalition because it was a compromise, and so he could always attack one side or the other.

It was this agitation, perhaps, prevented him from progressing further with Janet. She felt compelled to take in his papers and they disgusted her. She was wholly tired of the war. She had never been a patriot, but a vague distaste for the pacifists forbade her to unite with them. She wanted the war won, but a fine discrimination made the methods of war-winning repulsive to her. And yet, that which repelled attracted her. War was dramatic. So Bulmer, in those days, found in his sweet friend uncertain support, an uncertainty that sometimes favoured him. Thus, she showed him a cutting from a rival newspaper, which proved that the statistics he quoted in support of the strict blockade misrepresented the case, because they stated it only in part.

"Oh, we can't bother about that," said Bulmer. "We've got to win the war."

"I'm not talking about that," said Janet. "I quite agree with you. But can't we win the war without using fraudulent statistics?"

"I don't know and I don't care," said Bulmer. "All I know is we want a strict blockade, and if we start putting down columns and columns of figures nobody'll read them."

"But surely you agree it's wrong to mislead people."

"One's got to mislead people if one wants to lead them."

She did not reply. That was the sort of remark with which Bulmer always silenced her repugnance. His extremism seemed to her magnificent. But he was hurt, he felt the need to state himself:

"Oh, yes, I know! You're like all those people . . . it's your charm, I suppose, it's delightful in you, all that about playing the game and telling the truth. But you can't do it: you can't play the game with life; life always uses loaded dice if it gets a chance.. And you can't tell people the truth: it's the only thing they don't believe. There's only one way to lead in the press, and that is to lead, honestly if you can, but lead."

"Where to?"

"I don't know. Life goes marching on, we don't know where to. Why not walk in the first row rather than in the last? I don't know and I don't care. I read something the other day about the earth getting cold in a million years. Well, we'll see about that in a million years. For all we know, in a million years there may be nothing left except 'The Daily Gazette.'"

She laughed at his seriousness: "Dick," she said, "I do hope you go to heaven and float 'The Eden Gazette' with an edition in Greek for the Elysian Fields, and others in Arabic and Hindustani for the other peoples of the British Raj."

"Well, I may go somewhere else," said Bulmer, smiling.

"I hope not," said Janet. "You see, paper is so combustible. The only consolation for you would be the yellow colour of the flame."

Bulmer suddenly grew earnest: "Yellow! What

about it if we are the Yellow Press? I believe in the Yellow Press! Anyhow, it's more alive than the stewed tea and pink pill press. People talk against the Yellow Press! It's a lot they know about it. The Yellow Press is the biggest thing that has happened to the world since steam. And that was the biggest thing before then. The Yellow Press has moved humanity and taught it to read. Oh, yes, I know you'll say it has taught humanity to read snippets, and paragraphs, and scandal. That's true: but what did humanity read before I taught it to read something? I'm not the first in the field: 'The Daily Mail's' five years older than me. But, before we came, men like me, like Northcliffe, like Hulton, like Rothermere, what do you think the people read? do you think they read 'The Times' and 'The Spectator?' They read nothing. They ate, they drank, they thought just as much as a lot of cattle in a field. What good do you think compulsory education was? Before me there was nothing with which to educate."

"Surely," said Janet, "you don't educate. You only give them the news."

"Yes, I do educate. I give them the news, yes, and in so doing I teach them everything a man needs to know. I teach them geography, I teach them history, in a way in which they can learn it. I stimulate their interest in strange things. I've taught them that the thunderbolt is not the arrow of God; I've made them understand what is electricity. And I haven't burdened them with great fat columns filled with words they don't understand. I've slung at them words I don't understand myself, just a few, words like dynamo, alternating current. Just enough to excite their interest, so that those who are really interested can go on. I have blazed the trail of knowledge. I have got them out of their Sunday afternoon sleep. I've interested them in plays, in tariffs, in pictures. Bad plays, you say, and bad pictures. Very likely: that's no business of mine. It's their business to go on when I've started them. I'm an agitator, I'm not a prophet. I show 'em the way; without me there'd be no signpost. There'd be nobody except some mandarins in the universities to care about knowledge and art. I don't

care about art myself much, but I advertise it. I make the arts, I make the sciences, because the Yellow Press gives them a chance among millions of men. Talk about the red flag as the standard of revolution! I say the yellow flag is the true standard of the revolution of men against stupidity and ignorance. I know one doesn't do that sort of thing without doing some damage. My little paragraphs have broken up the people's capacity for concentration; they can't read a column now: but when did they read a column? Never! The working men and the typists and clerks in the trains? They have never read a column, but they read me. I've let hysteria loose, taste for scandal, superficiality, crude views, vulgarity. Yes, I have, but before me was stagnation. In my pond at least there are bubbles where twenty years ago there was only frog-spawn. You don't know what it was like in the 'eighties when I was a boy. You haven't seen your father sleeping off his meal on a Sunday afternoon, your mother counting the napkins in the intervals of reading some slush by Ouida, and your sisters embroidering table centres for people who'd done them no harm. You haven't lived in an atmosphere like blancmange. But I have, and I've burst through all that. I've driven the chariot of progress through the black thickets of the nineteenth century. I've irritated the public, and bullied it, and excited it, because I've stimulated its interest. What would you have me sling at them? Not the 'Quarterly Review.' Oh, yes, I know my stuff's not artistic, but I'm not ashamed. It's stuff just as good as the people can take. And when they can take better stuff, they shall have it, because it is my job to give it 'em."

"Do you never blush for the stuff?" asked Janet.

"No. Yellow can't blush. Besides, why should we blush? the Yellow Press is real and alive, and I've no use for the 'Athenæum' and the 'Mausoleum,' those elegant amusements of country gentlemen who have nothing to do. My public's busy living, and it's got to be stimulated if it's to be interested enough to keep alive. It finds life hard, and I make it exciting. I do that by the journalistc touch; I make an archbishop topical. Without me he wouldn't be a topic at all.

If I chose to quote Shelley at the end of an advertisement of Bile Beans, I'd make a popularity for Shelley that he never got out of the 'Blackbird,' or the 'Skylark,' or whatever bird it was. I am the ginger of the world. What I attack crashes, because I wake up all those who are ready to hate it. What I support rises, because millions of men are asking to be led. They follow me because I am not afraid. If an enemy attacks me I interview him, if I think fit, and give his views publicity so that he may advertise me. If he is entirely furious, I photograph him. But whatever I do, I do the thing which is going to give the public a little shock of surprise or pleasure. A spirit was breathed into Adam: I breathe into him another one, the spirit of the day. You understand?" he cried, urgently. "You see what I mean?" His mood changed; he flung himself on his knees by her side, clasping her close and whispering ardent words. He frightened and overwhelmed her, but delighted her, as if even she, so withdrawn, so cool, even she were stimulated and excited by this servant of the people.

"No, don't ask me yet," she murmured. "Oh, I don't pretend to be moral. I'm sure of you, yes, but I'm not sure of myself yet. For what I give you I shan't take away." Unable to understand her own emotions, she bent down, swiftly kissed his cheek, and freed herself before he could, in incredulous delight, press further his apparent victory.

CHAPTER VIII

PROCLAMATIONS

BULMER had several times heard the name of Major Houghton. For two or three months it had recurred in Janet's conversation. "Major Houghton says." Or: "Major Houghton told me it isn't the shelling the men mind, but . . ." A curiosity awoke in Bulmer, not because Houghton interested him, but because he could not bear the existence of the unknown. So he was interested to meet him at lunch at Janet's. It was a small party. Besides himself and Janet, there were only two elderly relatives of hers, Major Houghton, and Eleanor, who had been asked, he did not know why. During lunch, Bulmer seemed to dominate the assembly. His victory over Lord Immingham in the matter of machine guns still conferred upon him a certain prestige, and so for three courses he was able to mouth defiance of the Government and to threaten its individual members. He had just invented a new word: "shuffle"; everything was shuffle, and everybody was shuffling. So it was to be until he discovered a new word. That morning he was particularly happy, because Mr. Edgeworth had at last been convicted in the House of having allowed an invention to be returned unexamined.

"Of course he explained," said Bulmer, "that's what a minister's for. To find sixteen different reasons why a thing hasn't been done. It made one ill I can tell you, to listen to him, smooth like a wet seal, talking of the public interest and the necessities of the situation, and all the balderdash that private secretaries teach their ministers, the same old song always taught to the new parrot."

Houghton laughed, and Bulmer looked at him approvingly.

"Parrots!" he said again, "shuffling from one leg to the other. First they shuffle on the right leg, and then they shuffle on the left leg. And then they stand on their head and hold on to their perch with their beak and try to shuffle that way. Shuffle! I'll have the lot out. You saw the placard of 'The Day'? Double crown and bright yellow. And just the word 'Shuffle' printed on it. I expect Edgeworth read that placard as he went to what he calls work after his eggs and bacon: it isn't shuffle he did; it's totter."

The elderly relatives watched him with horror and delight. They had in their lifetime met a number of lords, the sort of lords who, in the country, exchanged a joke with a labourer, radiated patronage and benevolence at horse-shows, and only voted in the House once in their lives, against the Parliament Bill of that pettifogging Welsh attorney, Lloyd George. But this sort of lord was new to them. His voice. His rolling eye. And his incredible determination to do things, smash things, put up things. Instead of leaving things where they beautifully were, as was the way of their sort of lord. Their amazement thrilled Bulmer. Seeing that they were impressed, he felt he must impress them more, and so addressed them almost exclusively. He was going to do things to Mr. Edgeworth. Mr. Edgeworth was going to be an ex-minister within a week. There was going to be a leader about him in "The Day." And when a man got a leader in "The Day," either he went up or he went down.

"But," faltered at last the elderly female relative, "everybody says that Mr. Edgeworth's a great business man. Who are you going to have instead?"

"Anybody," said Bulmer. "One couldn't lose on the deal. But it isn't a question of getting somebody. I've got somebody in my mind's eye. There's a young man called Anstey, quite a young member. But he's got hold of an idea . . . well, perhaps I'd better not mention it, but I tell you it's an idea that would make a Berliner wish he was in . . . the lower regions instead of in Berlin. There's not much in his way. Anstey's going up, and Edgeworth's going down. And each of

them will be kicked his own way by the same boot. Mine."

The old couple felt very pleased and in the know when, a few days later, they read in " The Day " (which they still took in, though much puzzled by the repairs effected since the Mortimer period) that Mr. Edgeworth was to take a peerage. They did not exactly realize that this was a disgrace, but a friend insinuated that a peerage was, in these days, less significant than a seat in the House of Commons, and anyhow it was a very new peerage. Simultaneously Anstey boomed, thanks to the mysterious booming of his invention. Anstey was photographed at home, sometimes in his laboratory, working on his bomb (which later turned out to be filled with prussic acid), and also in gayer moods, playing with his dogs, or carrying upon each knee a little girl borrowed for the occasion. The entire Bulmer press went Ansteyite, and for a few weeks it was understood that " the bracing influence of a gallant young soldier " was going to redeem Mr. Edgeworth's unfortunate department.

While Bulmer terrified and delighted Janet's relatives, Major Houghton was being interviewed by Eleanor on war and the warrior. She was horrified when Houghton told her that he hoped his convalescence would be slow as he wanted to hang on and get a chance with the grouse.

" But," cried Eleanor, whose every angle expressed choked incredulity, " do you mean to say you don't want to go back ? "

" Not at all," he said. " Why should I want to ? Do you think I enjoy it ? "

Eleanor hesitated. She couldn't call him a coward as he wore the M.C. and a wound stripe, and in addition carried his right arm in a sling.

" Enjoy it," she said ; " no, I didn't say that. But surely you want to go back. All men want to go back."

" You should ask my battery," said Houghton. " The only place they want to go back to is the base. As for me, I'd bolt, if Byng hadn't posted infantry with machine guns behind our brigade."

" But," cried Eleanor, " why should he do that ? "

Very carefully Major Houghton replied : " Well, you see, that's modern war. The men in the second line have instructions to shoot the first line if it tries to bolt. The third line does that to the second line. The R.F.A. is kept in place by machine guns. Behind these we put the R.G.A. which'll shell 'em if they move. And so on right down to the base. And of course the base doesn't move because they're out of range. So they don't need watching, and when there's a show on, everybody goes ahead like smoke."

" You're making fun of me," said Eleanor, for Janet had begun to laugh. " You know quite well you want to go back like the others, because you'd be unhappy if you didn't."

" I should try to bear up," said Houghton.

Eleanor was much annoyed ; she disliked chaff because she was never quite sure what was chaff and what wasn't. So she ended by quarrelling with Houghton, who saw nothing tragic in the royal family having adopted the name of Windsor.

" Everybody's doing it," he remarked, " even my bootmaker."

" I think it's tragic," said Eleanor, " it draws attention. It makes people talk of republics."

" Well, let's talk of republics," said Houghton. " I'm a republican just now. Caught it in France. And it's worse than trench feet ; it's internal. You know, war has frightful effects on your politics : I went out Conservative ; then I was buried by a whizzbang, and they dug me up Radical. Sorry, Lord Bulmer, I didn't mean to offend you, some of us are born like that. Others like me have got to rise again. But, you know, Miss Bulmer, after catching the republican microbe, I've lately been kept awake by a micro-organism called Socialism. There's no Keatings for that." Wickedly he began to scratch his right shoulder. " There, I can feel it nibbling. When it's the left side, it's Smillie at me ; when it's the right, it's Sidney Webb. Smillie," he whispered, " is much worse." Then Eleanor turned an offended back on him and told the male elderly relative what plays he ought to see while he was in town.

After lunch, Bulmer drew close to Houghton. He

liked him, because Eleanor, as they went into the drawing-room, told him that the young fellow was either underbred or had not recovered from shell-shock. Houghton was about thirty-two, and had just been given his majority. He was short, rather too broad, and had the narrowest, hardest grey eyes a man can have. With these went close, curly fair hair and an entirely impish mouth. He suggested contrast, for he had, with this joker's mouth, a savagely broad jaw, and large, ugly teeth. Bulmer found him difficult to handle, for Houghton sulked when one expected him to talk, and was given to bursts of oratory. Evidently he was agitated by the war, for he suddenly turned on Bulmer, who innocently asked him whether they didn't want more men.

"Oh, I'm fed up with this cry for men. All the papers shout for men when we can't get enough plum and apple to feed those we've got. I say we want less men out there and more men making plum and apple. Besides, the more men we put up and the more men the Boche puts up, the more get killed. Expect we've killed four or five million so far, and the more we lose the more we've got to put in. When everybody's dead we'll have won the war, and I hope everybody'll be happy wherever they are."

"Oh, of course we want more men," said Bulmer.

"Well, when they're all dead, it'll only mean the white man's lost the war and the yellow men'll take over. Then they and the black men'll wipe each other out, and what's left over will be mopped up when science has progressed so far that we can at last start our war with Mars. When all the planets have rid each other of their population, then we'll have a general judgment day, and start all over again with a brand new nebular system and a higher intelligence, that is, an intelligence which can kill more quickly."

As nobody said anything, a little shocked by Houghton's bitterness, he went on: "What's this war after all? General vitality standing up to general vitality. You people here think it's soldiers only win the war, because you don't see 'em do it. We think it's the plum and apples win the war because we don't see plum and apples on the job."

"What do you mean by plum and apples?" said Bulmer.

"I mean the rest of you. I mean the miners and the fellows on the tramp steamers, and the girls who fill shells, and the kids who weave khaki. I come over here, and I find all the people rooting in the funkholes, talking of combing 'em out, and smoking 'em out. I guess you'll do it. You'll go on smoking out until there's nobody to till the fields, and nobody to drive locomotives, and nobody to dig potatoes. The papers over here are like bad sailors. They've started being sick, and they can't stop. All they can do is to whimper: 'Steward, bring another basin.'"

"But what do you want to do?" asked Bulmer.

"Oh, get on with the job, I suppose. Finish the war, anyhow, so that we can start getting ready for the next. Getting ready's jolly, all pipeclay and generals riding about madly in all directions; but war! war's dull."

It was not until a fortnight later, when the phrase, "Getting ready's jolly; but war! war's dull," struck Bulmer as strange as it came out of Janet's mouth. He suddenly connected. They had met accidentally at an at-home, and for a moment were standing together in a crowd. He asked with apparent irrelevancy:

"How long have you known Major Houghton?"

"Oh," said Janet, opening surprised eyes, "about three months. His people know mine."

"How long is he going to be in England?"

"Not very long, I believe. His wound's nearly well. At least, he told me that his last board said that he'd be fit in a month or two." Janet looked away and said meditatively: "He tells me his battery has just sailed for Mesopotamia."

After a moment, during which Bulmer abstractedly got out of the way of busy young soldiers who were balancing ices over his head, he looked up and stared at Janet. Then he said:

"Janet, if I get a divorce will you marry me?"

"What!" said Janet. "For heaven's sake, Dick, don't say these things here."

He looked about him vaguely. They were entirely

surrounded by people who felt fat. It was very hot, and the young soldiers were breaking mercilessly in and out of the crowd, holding perilously, on sloping plates, various articles of food.

" Let's get out of this," said Bulmer ; " let's see if we can find a quiet corner." As this was a large house in Rutland Gate, they went out on a terrace that gave into a dark garden where a few couples were seeking corners. They leant for a moment over the balustrade, and Bulmer observed with content the long gracefulness of his partner. That night she wore a gown made mainly of white lace. She looked very girlish and pale, with her slender forearms on the balustrade.

" Well, yes," he said at length, " I love you, I've told you before." He said this without fervour, as if it were an accepted thing. As she did not reply, he added : " You know that, don't you ? "

She nodded.

" Well, I've never asked you exactly. But you like me, don't you ? "

She nodded again.

" Eighteen months ! You've been everything to me." His voice suddenly grew hoarse, and he grasped her bare arm. " And I love you. I'm mad for you. Oh, I know I'm old. Forty-six. Does it matter ? "

His passion made him acute. So he repeated : " That doesn't matter. But something matters."

She did not reply.

" What is it ? " he asked. " Is it that I'm not free ? Perhaps I could be free. Supposing I were free ? "

" It's not that."

" Well, what is it ? Oh, I know I'm not much. I . . . I've risen."

She turned quickly towards him, afraid that he discerned in her a disdain she did not feel.

" No," she said, " it's not that. You ought to know me by now. I shouldn't care whether you were free or not if I were sure I cared . . . well, only for you."

" Only for me ? " he repeated ; " how do you mean ?

" Well, one doesn't only care always for one thing or

one person. You care for your newspapers as much as you care for me."

"It's not true," he cried, hotly. "I'll . . . I'll sink the lot if you wish it."

"Would you?" she said, and her eyes glowed. For a moment Janet was the eternal mistress who bids the painter stab his picture, the engineer blow up his bridge, so that she may have no rival. Almost she said: "If you sink them . . . well, do with me what you will." But instead she replied: "Don't be absurd. I know what they mean to you, your papers. They are you."

"And you mean they aren't much? Well, we are what we are, my papers and I. We are the Yellow Press. Ours is the colour of the sunlight that lights up the dark places. The Yellow Press is the unafraid; it respects nothing, it fears nothing, it spares nothing. It cares for nothing except for the publication of the truth."

"Truth? Always?"

"The truth is not always expedient. The mob can't stand it."

"But are you content to please the mob?"

"I don't please the mob, I lead it. Oh, the mob isn't so low; it has a dim light in its mind like that half moon you see hanging there over South Kensington. The mob isn't so bad if there's somebody behind it. People call mob-rule ochlocracy, but the mob has sense. Anyhow I don't mind. Any 'cracy' will do for me. In aristocracy I'm strong, and I either join the aristocrats or I smash them, leading the people. In plutocracy I'm rich. In democracy I can be elected if I choose. In ochlocracy I can wait until the mob wavers and make myself an autocrat. Words, all that. I'm neither aristocratic nor democratic. I'm anycratic, because I understand my fellow-men, because I can stimulate them and move them."

"Dick, are you sure you stimulate them the right way?"

"What is the right way? Even Pontius Pilate didn't know what was truth. Of course, he was a lawyer. My way's the right way because I believe in it. Yes, I know I interest the people in sensation, in murders,

and cinemas, and stolen jewellery . . . but what else am I to interest them in? Do you think you can interest them in conchology or the use of globes? Other publications have tried, and they have interested them in nothing. Fifty years ago all the people cared for was feeble love and strong beer. I woke 'em up. By making a million of them read about Crippen in my fifth page, I got a hundred thousand to read Arnold Bennett in my fourth. Thanks to my missing word competitions, I entice a proportion of them to the Russian ballet. I get people into my fold by giving them what they want, and when I've snared 'em in, I make some of them have what I want. Oh, I know, you've said it before: does it last? Does it do them any good? How do I know? I'm the man of the moment, how do you expect me to be the man of all time? I'm the mirror of the times, and as times change the picture changes. Mirrors don't hold pictures; if you want a picture to stay you'll have to get a damned waxwork from Madam Tussaud's. My papers freeze life stiff for the moment. They solidify a mood. Why should a picture last longer than a mood? I may turn into ashes, but Cadbury will turn into Gorgonzola. I may be bound to earth, but that's as good as surviving in a Brummagem heaven fitted with feather wings made by sweated girls at twopence farthing an hour. No, I've no use for pijaw. I teach the people what I like, and I like everything. I'm like the sea that washes up offal and jewels. It's for you to take your pick. I show you the present; it's your job to fish out the future. The future, what is it? Only the present . . . more so. I'm the future. Round me, in this house, there are three hundred subjects of Queen Victoria. I'm a subject of Edward VIII."

His vehemence shook her. It was always the same thing. She could not help admiring him when his mind rode the torrent. He was coarse; he was brutal. She knew all that. And a recent influence was inclining her to a vision of life richer in humour, more contemptuous of actuality, more mistily idealistic. Just then she hated the attraction she felt for this vigorous, limited man. So she said, "Oh, Dick, I wish you wouldn't talk like that. You complicate things."

He stared at her: "I don't understand."

"You're so interesting, and yet . . . you frighten me."

"How?"

"Well, other people take life so differently. They look ahead. They criticize. You, you don't criticize. You take things as they are and print them."

"Other people," said Bulmer, who had grasped the only essential phrase. So, after a long pause, with sudden intuition he said: "Do you like Major Houghton?"

"Yes." Her eyes were startled. Never before had Bulmer shown intuition. It was terrifying. It was such overwhelming evidence of the love he bore her. He went on with his usual directness:

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"No, of course not," she said, hotly. "What makes you think that?"

"I don't know. I'm not myself to-night. It's come on me suddenly. Supposing I lost you!" She could not bear to see him unhappy, and pressed his hand. "Don't be afraid," she murmured, "you shall never lose me, as you put it, unless you want to. And don't ask me questions about Major Houghton. I like him. Of course, I like him. I like lots of people."

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Well, if you will hurt yourself, I can't save you all the time. He has said that he will ask me when he comes back from Mesopotamia."

"And what did you say?"

"I could not forbid him to. The crossing-sweeper can ask me to marry him if he chooses."

"You don't speak of him as if he were a crossing-sweeper."

Suddenly he grasped her by the elbow. They were in the shadow and he drew her into his arms. She half resisted.

"Janet," he murmured, "I can't bear it any more. Come away with me to-night, never mind anything . . . scandal . . . smash everything . . . never mind. You will . . . you will if you love me."

For a moment she surrendered herself, and he thought that she returned his kiss, but she freed herself.

" No, Dick, one's got to be very sure of oneself before one smashes everything else." Before he could stop her she had run up the steps. She went lightly, and a silken rustle followed her for a moment, then was heard no more.

CHAPTER IX

GHOSTS

BULMER did not at once realize that he might fail to gain Janet. The idea of failure was unfamiliar to him, and, as a rule, where other men would have glimpsed defeat he saw only difficulty. Hence often his victories. He had created himself as the British created the Empire, by sitting on things and obstinately staying there, however hard other people might push, by failing to understand, half out of stupidity, that the enemy had scored a victory. In the end the enemy, weary of victorious but fruitless struggles, had given way, left the British Empire standing, and Bulmer in power.

So he construed Janet's attitude as evasiveness, to which he knew women were given. He felt that she might be trying to rouse his jealousy through Houghton, and though he was surprised that such a woman should so condescend, he was too well assured that all women are alike to deny her the tendency to provoke. He laughed a little as he went to bed that night. He felt secure because, obviously, he could not be beaten by a twopenny major. He thought: "So you're leading me on!" and tolerant joy came over him: why should Janet lead him on unless she wanted him? He loved her the more for this futility, this childishness. She was a real woman, then. And as a real woman she must be treated. He thought: "I must make you jealous." Hence his rather public affair with Lady Eggington. She was a little older than she had been when at Bargo Court she gained the admiration of Mr. Felton, but she was still creditable, well-known, and left very free by a husband whose dreams were filled with lard and spermaceti. For a week or two

Bulmer enjoyed taking her about. Once, when they were riding in the Row, they met Janet, who had as an escort two naval men who rode very badly but rode all the same, as is the way of naval men. They acknowledged each other, and Bulmer found no significance in Janet's grave smile. They were faintly hostile that morning. It was almost as intimate as being lovers. But the meeting ended the Eggington affair: Bulmer could not resist comparison, and as Janet passed careless on her way, flushed, the broad-brimmed bowler ridging her thick dark hair, so bright, so dewy, her firm, gauntletted hands held high, Lady Eggington suddenly suggested the hothouse, the circus. Her stock was too fashionable, the pommel of her riding-crop too ornate. She sickened him. He felt that she bathed in eau-de-Cologne; he wanted his soap-and-water nymph.

But even so he maintained his plan. He was seeing Janet once or twice a week, found her aloof, as if troubled, sometimes rebellious, when he tried to touch her, sometimes, as if remorseful, inclined to offer caresses that hinted at surrender, yet withheld it. She disturbed him. She increased his loneliness. Once, unable to bear any longer his emotional isolation, he dined with Vi, and, on her persuasion, went back with her to Finchley to have a drink, as she put it. He discovered with surprise, as he sat for a moment in the drawing-room, that he liked being with Vi. The drawing-room was well arranged; the lights were soft and pink-shaded. Vi did not look forty-nine; being dark, she had worn well, and that night by good fortune she wore a frock of champagne *crêpe de Chine* that toned in with her broad olive shoulders. After a time she said:

"Dick, do you know you've never seen the house."

"Why, you're right, I haven't."

"Let me take you round."

He followed her, saw the dining-room, praised the Cromwellian table. He followed her upstairs, where were various bedrooms, she switching on the lights and he switching them off. It was curiously conjugal, this sharing of labour. So intimate was this feeling that he entered her bedroom without disturbance. The room was cerise, still cerise, and a little gush of sentiment

invaded him. She always liked cerise. At last he said : " It's getting late. I must go."

Vi stood before him, knotting and unknotting her dark hands. Fortunately again, that night she wore no jewels except her wedding ring. The light was very faint, and through her eyelashes he caught for a moment the humid look that had drawn him twenty years before. The time machine was turning him back into the past. So he said : " You haven't changed much."

She smiled at him, was wise enough to make no reference to the long estrangement. She merely stood before him in woman's most appealing attitude, ready to give, ready to forgo, as man might will. Only she took a little step towards him. The thought of Janet passed through his brain. He thought : " If Janet knew ! " then : " Perhaps it would be better if she knew." But almost at once his capacity for thinking disappeared. He was conscious only of his illusion. He took Vi in his arms, and kissed the dark lips that yielded to him coolly. It was as if he grasped a scented despair ; he was hers as he had never been. Vi made on him no emotional demand ; she was physical, obvious, and in this conjugal possession he abdicated. The heavy warmth of her arms, the quick, hard breath that rose from her deep bosom, all united to make her into abstract woman fit only for ardour. As she pressed her lips to his, it was as if he were suffocated in a gas of incredible sweetness.

Yet, two hours later, as he lay awake, listening to the heavy breathing of his wife, as he stared at the panels of the wardrobe that shone in the faint moonlight, he was conscious of failure. He told himself : " It will be difficult." What had he done ? He had compromised himself . . . with his wife. Could a man fall into worse error ? But he was practical still, and told himself : " I've been a fool. Only, I might have been a fool with somebody else and it wouldn't have mattered." He could still see his wife's profile. She lay with parted lips, not unbeautiful in the faint light, his mate if they had been beasts. He wondered what dreams passed under that low olive forehead. He knew that she did not content him, that she merely satisfied a need which she had not created. With a

sigh he lifted the thick, downy arm that lay across him, and, turning upon his side, soon was asleep.

With sudden indiscretion, next day he told Janet what had happened. It was as if he wanted to provoke her, but he was angry when she said :

" Well, why not ? Why don't you go back to your wife ? "

" You know quite well I can't do that. Only, if you shut me out of your life, what am I to do ? "

" I'm not shutting you out, but how can I take you into it if I'm not sure that I want you there ? Oh, I know it might happen, but would you like me to be the memory of a night . . . like your wife ? "

" Janet ! " He was shocked ; then, offence turning to pain, he said : " Do you really think that's how I look upon you ? "

" No." She took his hand, rather ashamed. " I didn't mean that. Don't talk about it any more just now."

" Where's Houghton ? "

" At Bassora. But don't talk about him, or you, or me. Must it be true that a man and a woman can't be friends, even when it's a man like you ? "

" I'm a man like any other man. But I'll never stop wanting you."

" Oh," she said, " if only you were not you, how I should love you ! " She laughed. " What nonsense I talk ! Of course, if you weren't you and I loved you I wouldn't love you."

Bulmer had no time to penetrate more deeply the emotional complexity of his situation. Already that day he had missed a conference. He told Janet, and she said : " Dick ! what a tribute."

" It's all very well," he said, " but I ought to have been there."

Indeed, just then, he was preoccupied by the responsibilities he had created for himself. Hating Mr. Asquith because his nimbleness automatically revolted against the slowness of the Yorkshireman, because he found in the Premier an almost wilful lack of imagination, he supported him as a Liberal must, and strove to supplant him by Escombe. He liked Escombe. There was in the short, wiry little Radical barrister, something that

appealed to him that was fitful as a light wind. He liked Escombe's incapacity to avoid action. For twenty years he had seen him establish apparently impossible situations by promising everybody everything they wanted, and then, confronted with the results of his cleverness, erect a series of bogeys, demonstrate to the holders of his pledges that only for their good was he breaking those pledges. The sight of Escombe was pleasant to him, the broad forehead, about which the black hair, spattered with grey, stuck out in wisps useful to Bernard Partridge and F. C. G., the irregular, pugnacious nose, the evasive chin and faintly amused mouth under the heavy moustache. He often talked with Escombe, and always came out soothed and flattered, for the grey eyes, rather withdrawn beyond the pocketed eyelids and the close-hanging, heavy brows, always conveyed to him: "Lord Bulmer, I couldn't do without you." Bulmer never suspected that everybody who met Escombe, whether peer or labour leader, felt the same thing. He had not enough subtlety to understand the subtlety of Escombe, and whenever he went to the minister, demanding that this or that should be done, he found when he came that something else had been done, which looked exactly like his original proposal but was in some intangible manner different. Bulmer bullied people into things; Escombe tripped them into things. Sometimes Bulmer wondered whether he was being wangled, as, for instance, in the matter of war economy and import trade. Being a simple man, he tried to explain to Escombe that if we went on importing commodities we must pay for them; therefore we must spend money; therefore we could not practise economy. But Escombe said:

"I quite agree with you, my dear Bulmer. You put it with a lucidity that is unfortunately rare nowadays. Only, you see, failing imports you cannot export; failing exports you make no profits. Failing profits you have nothing to economize with. Therefore, the more you import the more you export, the more profits you make. Therefore the more you spend the more you have. That, I take it, is your meaning?"

"Not exactly," said Bulmer, puzzled.

"Forgive me if I have misunderstood you," said Escombe. "I'm only trying to give a practical form to your views, with which I wholly sympathize. I take it that you want to press for facilities for free imports, do you not?"

"Of course," said Bulmer, "I'm a Free Trader."

"Good. So am I. I always was. Therefore you will continue to preach reduction of expenditure? I shall be speaking on it to-morrow at Bradford."

Bulmer went out a little later entirely unable to understand what had happened. Escombe seemed not only to have committed him to two opposite views, but to have convinced him that he held both. Escombe had contributed nothing to the conversation. He seemed merely to elucidate what Bulmer meant. In the end, Bulmer ceased to try to understand Escombe's policy. He even ceased to rebel. Hitting Escombe's policy was like hitting butter; it gave way to the fist, and closed round it in an affectionate grasp.

So he went on, the old life of one damn exciting thing after another being converted into one damn exciting campaign after another. New men outlined themselves on his stormy horizon, and were overwhelmed by the next squall. For six weeks Sir Benjamin Martin was described as a skilful municipal administrator, and made Materials Controller. Then it was discovered that all materials were already controlled, and that Sir Benjamin's principal function was to interpose another week's delay between the producer and the consumer. Also his intervention caused materials completely to disappear. He disappeared too, and Rob made a cartoon of his funeral, where the Cabinet were represented as mourners with tall hats tied with weepers of red tape. The war went on, and Bulmer enjoyed it. He met Clevedon, the young war painter, an ex-cubist, who had discovered that the vision of the times is the world seen from an aeroplane. Clevedon was given a "Daily Gazette" one-man show. Life was filled with interviews, with the rise and fall of reputations, and meetings were held at Upper Brook Street, copies of the minutes being then sent through the usual route as peremptory advice to the Cabinet.

Early in January, 1917, about two hours after the

" all clear," Bulmer woke to the persistent ringing of the telephone by his bedside. He did not reply for a moment. Then, quietly : " Yes, of course it's a great shock." Then again : " Oh, of course, of course ! "

" My poor Dick," said Janet, a few hours later, putting an arm round his shoulders with sisterly affection. " Of course I know . . . but still, after so many years . . ."

" Oh, don't let's be sentimental," said Bulmer, who shook himself free and walked about the room. " I don't say that if I could have prevented it I wouldn't have done so, but when there's an air raid some people must be killed."

" Dick," said Janet, after a moment, as she picked up " The Day," which was lying on an arm-chair, " do you think you need have made so much of it in the paper ? "

" What's the matter with it ? DEATH OF LADY BULMER. Little biographic notice. What else could the paper do ? "

" Oh, I don't say. Still—— "

Janet did not like to explain to the presumably stricken husband, notoriously separated from his wife, that it might have been better to avoid such detailed references to her.

" I don't know what you mean. I'm pretty well known. Supposing it'd been a princess had been killed in an air raid, do you think there'd have been nothing about it in the papers ? "

" You don't understand," said Janet.

" No, I don't. It's news."

She smiled. " Oh, Dick ! you're incorrigible." Encouraged by her smile, he snatched her hand : " Janet," he whispered, " perhaps I oughtn't to say so just yet, before . . . before she's buried, but I'm free. I know I ought not to say it now."

" Oh, don't be ridiculous," she replied, " you're being conventional. You didn't mind making love to me when your wife was alive, and I suppose you won't mind doing it after the funeral. Why should you sacrifice three days as a decent interval ? "

She puzzled him, but he did not release her, and merely repeated :

" I'm free. In a few days I'll come to you, and then you'll have to answer me. Oh, I know there are things you don't like in me, but what's the use of liking everything in people? There's no merit in loving if one does that."

" Dick," she cried, opening her eyes very wide, " you're getting subtle." She laughed. " I've said that before, the first time we met."

" One gets all sorts of funny things when one's in love. I'd do anything in the world for you. Oh, I know I'm not much. I'm like my papers. My papers and I, we appeal to the lowest people because there are more of 'em. But what's low? what's high? You don't know. Standing here in London we think Australia's under our feet. But the Australians think it's we are under theirs. When I want a feature, or a placard, I put up the heat wave, or the holiday exodus, or get up a beauty competition, or I print the story of her life by a woman who's had seven husbands. You call that low, I suppose. But what do you think would happen if I put on my placard, " Redemption of the Floating Debt." Or: " Startling Ornithological Discovery." If I did that I'd be appealing, not to the high, but to the highbrow. I'm a second-rate man. He cuts more ice than the first-rate man. He's like Napoleon, nearer to the earth, nearer to the common people. When I print paragraphs about the cinema, or the price of season tickets, or a clear statement on the differences between wisteria and hysteria, when I interest in a single issue the Wigan office-boy on his way to the football ground and the suburban baby in its pram, I feel like the old ravens that brought his morning eggs and bacon to Elias, or Elijah, or what's his name. William Whiteley doesn't get beyond things you can eat and things you can wear. I'm the universal provider of human interest. I can't help human interest being what it is."

" I won't argue with you," said Janet; " you always seem right, and somehow that always convinces me you're wrong. Things are not what they seem."

" That's where you're wrong. Things are what they seem. And, anyhow, what's it matter what they are if they don't seem it? You'll never know. But don't

let's bother about that. I can only think of one thing, and that's you." He tried to take her in his arms.

"No, please don't, Dick. Not now. I'm too miserable."

"What's troubling you?" he asked, anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know, the war and that sort of thing. Here we are, 1917, and it may last years. I'm so tired of it."

"Tired of it?" asked Bulmer. "What do you mean?"

"I'm war-weary."

"Nonsense," said Bulmer. "The war's got to be won, so how can anybody be tired of it? I never met anybody who was war-weary."

She smiled. "That's because you aren't war-weary yourself. You believe everybody's like you."

He was not listening. "Janet," he said again, "we're talking of all sorts of things except the only one that matters. Tell me: do you care for anybody else?"

"No," she replied, and was honest, though her eyes seemed shifty.

"You haven't promised Houghton?"

"He's in Mesopotamia."

"You aren't answering me."

"No, I haven't promised him any more than you. But I won't be badgered. Let me go." She released herself.

"I don't understand," said Bulmer.

And he seemed so sad that she almost answered him; then she hesitated, and she went away.

CHAPTER X

THE CRUISE OF THE "GAZETTEER"

AT breakfast a certain amusement mixed with Janet's preoccupation. Jack, now nearly five, was rather troublesome, and rather disturbed her meditations.. From time to time he remarked: "May I have a bit of sugar?" Then, on being told that there was a war on, and therefore only one bit for every cup, he delivered pronouncements:

"I'm tired of the war. When there's a war one can't get sugar. I like sugar. I don't like war. When the war's over I'll have as much sugar as I like."

"Don't talk so much," said Janet.

"I'm only talking to myself, Mummie. Mummie, may I have another bit of sugar?" (Gloomily): "No, I suppose one can't have sugar when there's a war on. But I do like sugar."

"You'll have breakfast in the nursery if you don't stop talking," said Janet.

She went on with her breakfast, smiling now and then to herself and occasionally suppressing Jack, who maintained a constant undertone.

"Cook says eggs are sixpence each. She says that milk is going to be sixpence a quart. I wonder which is nicest, an egg or a quart of milk." (Loudly): "Mummie, what's a quart?"

"A quart is twice a pint, Jack, and a pint is twice a glass. And there's one glass extra in a quart. Now," added Janet, subtly, "you just try and think how many glasses go to the quart." With a grin of triumph she went on with her breakfast, and Jack said not another word; to the end he underwent the most horrible mathematical convulsions.

After receiving a kiss made adhesive by egg and

marmalade, Jack was removed by his nurse, to whom he vainly put problems regarding quarts and glasses of milk, while Janet once more took up "The Daily Gazette." She was smiling. Really Dick was delightful and absurd. One couldn't be angry with him. Could one love him? She considered for a moment. She felt fit to understand her own destiny: cold-bathed, well exercised by an hour in the Row, sufficiently fed, her body clad in pleasantly fitting clothes, she was released. Her mind was free, and she thought: "What am I going to do?" She felt together young and old, young in experience, old in perplexity. She thought: "I suppose I can't go on like this for ever. I'm twenty-nine, and one can only go on for ever if one's sixty. At twenty-nine things have got to change." She looked about her at this comfortably furnished dining-room that represented her so well, bowler and riding crop flung on the couch, bookcase crowded with books. There were a number of novels by Hewlett, Hardy, and Bennett, an intellectual conglomerate which represented her fairly well. She had Shaw's collected plays, also the plays of Galsworthy and Barker; many essays by Chesterton and Lucas; with these, unexpected contrasts: Thorold Rogers and Lord Acton, Anatole France, almost complete, and Marius the Epicurean. No poetry. Catholicity and chaos. Open-mindedness and uncertainty.

She thought: "Married too early, I suppose a mother too early, and some would say widowed too early. But they didn't know my husband. What a beast I am! I oughtn't to think that. But, after all, that's past: what next? I could become older, and sweeter, and more motherly, and be anxious when Jack gets the measles, and buy his boots when he goes to school. And then he'll go to Osborne and sail away. Or to South Kensington, and become an engineer and go away. Or to anywhere else, and marry somebody else, and go away. And I'll be thirty, and I'll be forty. And I may be a lot more: my people die hard." She sighed, and her thoughts grew irrelevant: "Missing! why don't I feel worse about it? Just one line under missing. Houghton, Charles, Maj. R.F.A. And in Mesopotamia! Dead or a prisoner of the Turks!"

She wondered why she did not cry, why she could recall the moment when Houghton had practically declared himself, and when by tacit agreement they had decided to speak no more of their community until the war was done. With a certain surprise she asked herself: "Is it Dick? Would I love Charlie if I didn't love Dick?" And her horrible clarity of mind made her add: "Would I love Dick if I didn't love Charlie?" She wondered if woman was ever so rent by twin and equal passions. It was so difficult to resist Dick! This last affair! Well, really! She took up "The Daily Gazette" again and decided to read the whole account. It ran as follows under enormous headlines:

CRUISE OF THE 'GAZETTEER.'
GERMAN CRUISER TORPEDOED BY 'DAILY GAZETTE' SUBMARINE.
FULL ACCOUNT OF THE MOST DARING EXPLOIT OF THE WAR
BY LORD BULMER.

"On the 5th March, 1917, at 6.30 P.M. one of the most powerful engines of destruction devised by the most cunning brains in the service of the Kaiser, was sent to its reckoning. The cruiser 'Wurzburg,' of which full technical description, plan and picture will be found on page six, and of which it is enough to say that she was of 22,000 tons burden, was launched only last December, and was capable of developing a speed of thirty-seven knots, has been sunk by 'The Daily Gazette.'

"It had too long been apparent to me that the conditions of naval stalemate which prevail in the North Sea should not prove insuperable to audacity combined with ingenuity. Therefore, anxious to arouse the British Admiralty from its profound slumbers, I determined to demonstrate by action that German patrol boats, German minefields, and German watchfulness could be made unavailing by intellect and courage. I have run the German blockade; is the Admiralty too blind as well as too sleepy to take a leaf from my book?"

Then followed an amazing story. It appeared that at the end of 1916 information came to Bulmer, which gave, more or less clearly, the position of the German minefields protecting Hamburg and Kiel. After considering whether he should hand this over to the Admiralty, he was held back by the memory of previous communications; the Admiralty always promised to give the matter their attention, and never did so. He

therefore decided to make use of the information himself, and to become a belligerent. He first attempted to purchase a submarine, but this proved impossible, partly because the request for a licence would either have been refused, or would have exposed his plans, partly because the vessel would have been stopped in the North Sea by the British patrols. "The Daily Gazette" group therefore decided themselves to go into the business of shipbuilding, and a complete naval yard was purchased from a Dutch firm on the Zuider Zee. There the "Gazetteer" was built, fitted with four torpedo tubes, provided with an American crew, headed by an expert American officer called Captain Antrobus. Then, laden with stores, her bunkers full of oil, stimulated by the promise of five thousand pounds for the captain and five hundred pounds for every man, the "Gazetteer" set out.

Captain Antrobus told his story with a sufficient journalistic touch. He took three days to reach Cuxhaven, for he was first of all chased by a Dutch destroyer, who had caught the "Gazetteer" in territorial waters. But Captain Antrobus submerged off Texel and, coolly doubling, passed under his pursuer's keel. Emerging, he skirted the Dutch coast, and, having made up as U. 73, which Bulmer knew was overdue, the "Gazetteer" was not molested by some German scouts. But the minefields proved a terrible business.

"Much to my disappointment," wrote Captain Antrobus, "I found that the chart with which I had been provided was either inaccurate or out of date. On approaching the commercial channel, which I expected to find in the minefield, I nearly ran into a chain of anchored mines. It was then seven o'clock and beginning to grow dark. To hesitate was impossible, as this would have meant going back to our starting point. I therefore decided to dive under the mines. At 7.30 we submerged and, making for the bottom, fortunately discovered that the mines were laid across a sand bank, the contact of which was not likely to damage the hull. I therefore progressed about four hundred yards, at about four knots. At 7.22, I encountered an obstruction. This turned out to be an

entanglement of wire hawsers, from which it is evident that the Germans had learnt something from Holbrook's dive under the Dardanelles minefield. I therefore returned to the surface and found myself, at 7.55, once more opposite what I assumed to be the minefield, which I skirted until 8.30 without finding a channel.

At this stage I realized that the only thing to do was to take my chance and sail straight through the minefield. This I did without mishap, though of course progress had to be slow. I reached safe waters at dawn, only to find myself confronted by five German destroyers, who promptly opened fire. To stay in this neighbourhood would have been fatal, as this would have invited the dropping of depth charges. *I therefore submerged, and, working my way back to the minefield, made for the bottom.* I felt assured that the destroyers would not drop depth charges there, as they would not want to detonate their own minefield, and would assume that if I went near it I should be destroyed."

Janet knew by now enough about war to realize why these words were printed in italics. The incredible gallantry of this move thrilled her. She had a vision of the " Gazetteer " slowly sinking down through the mine-strewn water, taking its chance of escaping contact with the mines, and at last resting upon the sand, surrounded backward, forward, right and left, and above, by great round objects which to touch was destruction.

Then it seemed that, after six hours, with infinite care, Captain Antrobus emerged, taking his chance of the mines, and, by a stroke of luck, he found the gate open, presumably because a vessel was about to leave the harbour. He reached the Cuxhaven booms just before dark, passed unobserved under the stern of the guardship, and discharged four torpedoes, of which one was seen to take effect on the " Wurzburg," while the other three went wide.

" In less than thirty seconds," said Captain Antrobus, " the whole port was blazing with light. Vereys and blue lights went up from, I think, thirty or forty vessels, and a number of searchlights were turned on us, fortunately missing us, thanks to the proximity of a pillar-buoy which was evidently taken for our periscope,

and in a few seconds was smothered in a hail of shells."

Apparently, in the disorder, the guardship, instead of maintaining her nose towards the booms, turned slightly as if to block the fairway. During this manœuvre the "Gazetteer" slipped past her, and within four hours reached the minefield. She went through as before, taking her chance.

"I thought I was safe," said Captain Antrobus, "and I should have been if I had not been picked up by four seaplanes, who proceeded to drop bombs, but the water proving opaque, they lost track of me, and I suffered no damage. Still, I thought it advisable to double back to the minefield, where I lay submerged for four hours, in what might be called a slightly delicate situation. As, however, on submerging, I took the not unreasonable risk of opening one of my oil tanks, the German seaplanes presumably concluded that one of the bombs must have taken effect, for the stain of oil which formed in the vicinity still persisted when I came up. Indeed the seaplanes had disappeared. For the rest it was a good journey. My foreman artificer informed me that, for the first time in his life, he had avoided sea-sickness."

Janet put down the paper and laughed aloud. Of course Bulmer was making the most of the affair in typical Bulmer fashion; the life-history and experience of Captain Antrobus filled a column; his second in command was likewise treated. There were pictures of the sheds where the "Gazetteer" was built; the eighth page was filled with photographs of members of the crew, of the "Gazetteer" emerging, of plans and sections of the submarine, and its victim, the "Wurzburg." There was even a photograph of the statement issued on the subject by the German Admiralty. This statement declared that the "Wurzburg" had been blown up by an internal explosion, but "The Daily Gazette" photographer, seated in the "Gazetteer's" tower, had snapped the sinking ship by means of the Germans' own searchlights, which also showed on a warehouse the words: Allgemeine Elektrizitaets Gesellschaft. The evidence was absolute. The audacity of it! In that moment Janet did not consider the gallantry of

Captain Antrobus and his crew. The affair struck her as eventually it struck London ; it seemed a delicious piece of cheek. The impression was maintained through the next two days. Embarrassing questions were asked in Parliament, and the First Lord had great difficulty in maintaining a dignified front, when persistently questioned by Mr. Pemberton Billing, who wanted to know why the Admiralty hadn't done this long ago. The First Lord repelled every question by stating that a reply would not be in the public interest, but grew uncomfortably hot. As for the Attorney-General, he was persecuted with requests to prosecute Bulmer the buccaneer as a filibuster. He, too, was much annoyed, for he would have liked to hang Bulmer, and when the irrepressible journalist printed an article in " The Day," demanding the resignation of the First Lord because he had neglected his duty by leaving his work to be done by a civilian, and declared that in future he would call himself Lord Bulmer of Wurzburg, the Admiralty decided that it must do something. So it attempted a seaplane raid on Emden, from which only one 'plane returned. Then Bulmer printed a leaded paragraph in which he elaborated :

" I go out alone and I sink a cruiser. The Admiralty sends sixteen 'planes and lose the lot." Finally the Government adopted the victory. Captain Antrobus was personally congratulated by the First Lord, given the C.M.G., and told that he would always be welcome in England. After all it was impossible to hang him. Bulmer was very happy. He gave his staff a week's pay, and presented to their children a silver mug, inscribed : " Wurzburg, 5th March, 1917." The only thing that annoyed him was that Janet was inclined to laugh.

" I don't see the joke," he said, aggrieved. " If ten people did as much as I have, the war wouldn't last long."

" Dick," she said, " as usual, you're incorrigible." And wondered whether one could love a child of forty-seven in any way except as a child. He was, she realized, not grown up, and it was perhaps this need for a protective mind held her away from him and fastened her to the tragic memory of Charles Houghton, humorous,

ironic, and perfectly ripe in spite of his youth. Perhaps because now Houghton was dumb, she felt that she must give herself to him. She hated her own femininity, which bade her turn away from the tangible to the fictitious. She thought: "Why am I like this? Dick loves me. In his way he's a great man, audacious, original, ruthless, direct. He annoys me because he lacks finesse. I'm a fool; one asks finesse of a razor, not of a sledge-hammer." Then she thought of Houghton, dying of thirst, perhaps, in a sandy ravine, and tears came to her eyes. She wept, then, as she thought of his thirst in that golden sand, under a scarlet sun flaming in a purple sky, and as she wiped her eyes she thought that to slake that thirst she would weep every tear of her body.

CHAPTER XI

POWER

THE uncertainty of Janet's attitude wrought in Bulmer a certain despair. Opposition he could meet; surrender he could take; uncertainty was something he could not understand and against which he was not armed. And his passion made him shrewd; he understood that pressure might lose him success, just as might negligence; so he abandoned the affair vaguely begun with Lady Eggington to make Janet jealous. He even revised his codes and reflected: "With another sort of woman that might work. But somehow I don't think it'd move her." He was learning about women, and now had enough wisdom to remain inactive. A conversation with a worldling almost led him to excess, for the worldling met in a club, joined his finger-tips, and said: "Women are like cats. If you move towards them they run away. But if you sit there and say, 'Puss, puss, puss,' and put a saucer of milk on the floor, in due course they will be moved by curiosity to come and see what there is in the saucer. Then, click! you've got the cat by the back of the neck so that it can't scratch you. When the cat has struggled enough and discovered that she can't get away, and been tickled behind the ear, she'll sit on your lap and purr. And then, ah, then, you no longer need say, 'Puss, puss, puss!' You can say, 'You damn cat!' and she'll go on sitting there, purring."

"The trouble is," thought Bulmer, "that I don't know what sort of milk to put into the saucer." So far he had offered rank, wealth, and passionate love, and Janet had circled about him, not hostile, but troubled and doubtful. He tried treating her as a friend, with a bluffness that did not fit him, because

he was not born in the bluff class. She fixed large, round eyes on him, and realized that he adopted manners in the same way as his newspapers adopted stunts. At last inaction became tedious, and once more he asked her to marry him.

"I wish you wouldn't, Dick," she replied. "If I could just say no to you, it wouldn't be so bad. But all I can answer is that I can't say yes."

Once more he went over his inadequacies, his age, his acknowledged cultural inferiority. She grew impatient.

"Oh, I do wish you wouldn't hold me so cheap. What is the use of talking like that? Do you think I'm the sort of woman who'd care if you were seventy-five or a coal-heaver? The only way I can look at a man is to ask myself whether I love him or whether I don't. And if I happen to fall in love with a man of seventy-five, or with a coal-heaver, it will be no more strange than falling in love with a Greek god. You don't understand, Dick. One falls in love or one doesn't, and if one doesn't it's no use trying to find an elixir of youth for the old man, or to wash the coal-heaver. If one falls in love, nothing can be done; and if one doesn't, nothing can be done either."

"Won't you risk it?" asked Bulmer.

She was touched by this humility:

"No, Dick, I won't risk it. It wouldn't be fair to you. You see, you'd share in the risk. It would be awful for you if I made you unhappy as a wife when you'd expected so much."

"Suppose I was Houghton?"

She flushed. Really his directness bordered vulgarity. "Please," she said, "let us leave Major Houghton out of this. You've worried me about him too often, and because you've wrung a few facts out of me, you . . . yes, you presume."

"He asked you to marry him?"

"I didn't say that."

"No, but I know. I feel it. If it weren't for him you'd marry me. No doubt you're going to marry him."

"I'm not going to discuss it." But she was stung by his false assumption and added: "I don't say . . .

well, he did ask me, and I said to him the same thing as to you. He's all right, thank goodness, a prisoner. We'll see when the war is done."

Bulmer accepted the situation. He had not enough intuition to realize that Houghton a prisoner of the Turks was more dangerous than Houghton lunching at the Ritz, for he was a romantic figure, and so did not tell himself that he would beat him more easily when he came home. He merely told himself that the struggle was adjourned, and that when Houghton came back he would be beaten as other men had been beaten by the Bulmer who had faced Lord Immingham and twisted his policy, broken Sir Benjamin Martin, Edgeworth; this Bulmer whose career was littered with broken men who had faced him, but never for long. Excepting at intervals, his passion did not flare up, but carried him through his busy life as the low accompaniment of a song. In those days, when America had come in, when Roumania was being invaded on all sides, when the British and allied governments were turning away from Kerensky, favouring the adventurer Korniloff, refusing to disclose their war aims because they feared to reveal themselves, when Frenchmen, Englishmen, Italians, were rifling the pockets of a drunken Europe, when the current of politics was at its most turbid, Bulmer was finding his power. The Bolsheviks had just seized Russia, exposed the secret treaties which had been made while deceived Wilson prated of justice. They revealed a world stinking as any saint, where self-determination meant the gerrymandering of German, Austrian, and Turkish territories, meant that every Naboth's vineyard the Allies coveted would vote for the Allies under the protection of allied rifles. Then it was clear that France once more was out for revenge, that Italy once more was out for vanity, that England as usual was out for loot; then the three B's that make empire—Beer, Bible, and Bayonet—were joined in symbolic panoply by *Honi soit qui mal y pense, Dieu protégé la France,* and perhaps even *E pluribus unum.* The world had fallen into the claws of brutal cynicism, snaky finesse, and filthy gold-lust, then the world was Bülmer's, was Bulmer.

He was happy in those days. Those were times when

hate of reason ran high, when revenge was a holy duty, when the morality of the world had shifted east of Suez, "where there ain't no ten commandments." One ceased to say: "Is it fair?" One said: "Will it hit the Hun?" One had set out to beat the Hun in the name of freedom; one was going to beat the Hun in the name of profit. So the Bulmer mind was the mind of the times, excessive, ruthless, dramatic. In the early years of the war he had been feared. Now he was obeyed. If in '14 he had said: "Hang the prisoners," the public would have been shocked; by degrees, because feelings grew vague, because life was cheap, because justice was complicated and revenge simple, because justice meant thinking, while revenge meant action, action only was taken as worthy.

Bulmer was in the councils of the Government. He was not now content with snapping at the heels of ministers, and occasionally flashing his teeth. The political seeds sown by Swinbrook, and encouraged by Singleton and Ash, had now grown into tall weeds. He wanted to shape policy, and he was encouraged by Escombe, who, with characteristic craft, sent for him from time to time, asked his advice and twisted his policy. It was Escombe induced him to take part in the shaping of the financial agreement between America and the Allies. He found Bulmer difficult to manage because the newspaper proprietor conceived a simple idea: the Allies had supplied the men, let America pay the cost of the war.

"See what I mean, Escombe?" he said. "Make a damn good headline. BRITISH BOYS AND AMERICAN DOLLARS. No. No good. Too many letters in it. What about British blood? Yes, they like blood nowadays . . . yes, Yankee gold. Rob'd do you a fine set of cartoons. Miss America giving a bag of dollars to a Tommy. And Miss America in a car made of dollars driving British officers in Flanders. Not brass hats. Public hates 'em."

"I quite agree with you," said Escombe. "Only you have to take into account that America has also sent some men. If you could guarantee that the war would be over before the American troops came into play, I should be entirely with you. But my hesitation

to forecast this makes me inclined to think that you yourself will want to revise your admirable idea."

"Hum, ha, yes, I see what you mean. But what about a sliding scale? What about putting up three hundred a year per man? that's what he costs; and have a clearing house at the end? Like that, if America put up a million men, she'd be credited with three hundred million a year. France with six million men, credited with eighteen hundred million a year. Sort it out when the war's done."

Escombe found him very difficult, because the minister tended to financial schemes that could only be worked by experts, while Bulmer thought of schemes that could be understood by readers of "The Daily Gazette." He floated a few of them, and so great was the noise that Escombe found himself compelled to adopt them in a modified form. But Bulmer was cautious enough to avoid traps. Thus, a banker came to him with a proposal to boom premium bonds. Bulmer hesitated. He was attracted by the idea of twenty thousand pound prizes and no interest. Damn the interest! But he reflected that while independence was all right now, it might not do after the war, because after the war people wouldn't be allowed to be independent. So he temporized, sounding Escombe, and on discovering that the Treasury was framing a statement against premium bonds, seized upon references to the matter in an opposition paper and caused "The Day" and all "The Gazettes" to take a violent line against the bonds, which he described as an immoral gamble prejudicial to British credit. In due course, when the Treasury had settled whether a certain sentence in their declaration required two commas or three, Bulmer was able to announce that he had stopped premium bonds. A Liberal Member of Parliament asked Escombe whether he took his orders from "The Daily Gazette" and was called to order by the Speaker. The public had no illusions as to the suppressed reply.

Indeed, as 1917 passed into 1918, the Government became conscious of the growing cry against Bulmer. Through him the Cabinet was now being raked on two sides; the Liberal papers said that it took its orders from Northcliffe; the Conservative papers said that

Escombe was a Jack in the Box, and only came out when Bulmer took off the lid; the neutral papers said that government had been reduced into a tennis singles between Northcliffe and Bulmer, and that Escombe was the ball. A few of the wiser people agreed that so far this representation of Escombe was correct, but that both Bulmer and Northcliffe would miss the ball before they had done with the game. Then Escombe offered Bulmer a seat in the Cabinet. This did not happen until early 1918, because a portion of the Cabinet threatened to resign if Bulmer were admitted, while as many threatened to resign if he was not. At that time the Prime Minister was too much concerned with Russia to control his government, and so Escombe, for five months, had to arrange his committees in such a way as to mix the two factions. For four months he managed to shelve the Bulmer question by creating a Defence Committee of three that resembled the sack into which the sultan puts the discarded favourite, with a cat and a snake, before throwing the whole into the Bosphorus. The favourite, in this case, Sir John Tibenham, the cat Mr. Bentley, and the snake Mr. D. Barnet, occupied the months in biting, scratching, or kicking each other, as was their nature. Escombe did not doubt that he could keep the Cabinet going in this way for many months, because the minor office holders would go on trying to shift the major office holders, while the latter would devote their energy to advertising themselves. Then he realized that Bulmer outside the Cabinet was more inconvenient than Bulmer inside.

"You know," he said to his secretary, "I think we'd better have him in. We'd find him some job that looks simple, and isn't. One might give him Ireland."

The secretary laughed. "Yes, why not try him with Ireland."

"It's an idea," said Escombe. "You see, he never mentions Ireland in 'The Daily Gazette,' and I've an idea that he'd bite if you offered him something new. He could paddle along for a few months. One could always keep him quiet by mislaying his minutes if they got too bad."

"Yes," said the secretary. "Of course, he'd want to put up a Home Rule Bill, but I think one could

persuade him to call a Convention first. That would take time, and the result would be vague."

"Yes," said Escombe, "that's it. And then, when the war's done, we'd let him put up his Bill. After that he wouldn't last a fortnight. At least, that's my experience of the last thirty Home Rule schemes."

Bulmer hesitated for a long time when offered a seat in the Cabinet. He realized that he would be very unpopular in the House of Lords, especially as Irish Secretary. It was very tempting. He'd be the biggest man in the Lords, bar the Lord Chancellor. He even told himself: "I wish mother was alive; it would serve her right." But, as he hesitated, Escombe made a mistake, and tried to persuade him; Bulmer, growing as suspicious as when he was offered a constituency, suggested terms:

"You know, if I take the Irish Secretaryship it wouldn't muzzle 'The Gazette,' would it?"

"Muzzle?" said Escombe shocked. "My dear fellow, the press is free in this country."

"Oh, is it!" said Bulmer, remembering the Press Bureau. "My man in Norwich tells me that you people blue-pencilled a complete article of his, and sent it in with the remark: 'Nothing of this may be printed except the title.'"

Escombe laughed. "Oh, well, you know, it wouldn't be in the public interest . . ."

"I know all about that," said Bulmer. "That's what you all say in the House. It wouldn't be in the public interest for me to criticize the Government if I was in it."

"You wouldn't want to," said Escombe, suavely. "You'd have a share in making their policy. Already you can see how you influence us."

"Yes," said Bulmer, suddenly enlightened, "I see. I'd be a rubber stamp on everything the Government did. And if I said anything, everybody'd say: 'Then why don't you throw up the job?' No. Not for this child. Northcliffe has taken the American Mission, and it may be that his correspondents put him on to many a fact the F.O. doesn't know, but you're offering me too much. You want to muzzle me by making me afraid to lose my seat in the Cabinet."

Escombe argued for a long time, but he could not move Bulmer. The relations between the minister and the newspaper proprietor were, at that time, rather peculiar. It was impossible to say whether Escombe used Bulmer for the performance of his private vendettas, or whether Bulmer selected the victims so that Escombe might gracefully give way to public opinion. The general impression that Bulmer ruled the minister was rather superficial, for Escombe quite as often induced Bulmer to try a policy on the public as Bulmer came to him with a written scheme, and asked him to put it into force. So it was unjust to clamour against government by newspaper. Occasionally Bulmer did, without consultation, force a policy upon the Cabinet, and likewise, once or twice, Escombe asked him to give publicity to a view, but the truth lay between these extremes. Bulmer was too independent to be ruled, and Escombe was too slippery. Their alliance, in those days, was rather that of a burglar and his assistant ; Bulmer used the jemmy, and Escombe, with a thousand ears, detected every whisper in the public-houses from John o' Groats to Land's End. This occasionally gave rise to apparent divergences. While " The Daily Gazettes " were raging for a reduction of the meat ration, Escombe was speaking at Durham and cheering everybody up by tales of great stores of chilled beef. This because Escombe had heard one of the whispers : the miners were demanding an extra ration, and so he thought it well to give them a few words. He knew that " The Daily Gazettes " could next day turn a somersault. Escombe's political style did not consist in somersaults ; it was more akin to skirt-dancing. Still, there was between the two men a kinship of temperament ; both were capricious, both unable to keep their hands off other people's jobs ; both were convinced that they alone could give a policy its finishing touch, and neither let to-morrow know what was said to-day. Bulmer was given to smashing things, and Escombe to ignoring them, but in any case the things toppled. Escombe felt sure that when the time came something would topple on Bulmer.

There was a little trouble between them in April, when the German offensive was bending the British

line on to Amiens, for Bulmer arrived early at Escombe's house with a complete set of posters, headed: "The Country is in Danger." He demanded that a mass levy be proclaimed, not only in Great Britain, but in every Dominion, and in India. Bulmer wanted the military age raised to sixty-five, the conscription of women, and the shutting down of all schools and institutions receiving children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen; these too were to be conscripted.

"Excuse me if I shave," said Escombe. "I've got a committee at 10.30. Very interesting. Yes, you have the situation well in hand. Very serious. I quite agree with you. You're printing all this in 'The Daily Gazette,' I suppose, this morning?"

"Well, no, not all of it. I wanted to see you first."

"Um . . . yes . . . I don't think you go far enough."

"What!" cried Bulmer, outraged by such a suggestion.

"No. I think we ought to do everything you say, and also close every business except munitions and food."

"Oh, I say," replied Bulmer, "do you think the public'll stick it?"

"You don't seem to know there is a war on," said Escombe.

"Nonsense," said Bulmer; "why go in for extreme measures if we don't need them?"

"Perhaps you're right," said Escombe, "but, after all, your own ideas are rather extreme."

"Well, I haven't published them," said Bulmer, aggrieved. "That's only my point of view." He became thoughtful. The extremism of Escombe had gone so much beyond his own that he felt overwhelmed by a new kind of extremism, namely, moderation. While Escombe went on soaping his face and carefully shaving, talking obvious nonsense about lowering the military age to fifteen, Bulmer grew more and more convinced that his own proposals had gone too far. They breakfasted together. Bulmer lowered the military age to fifty-five. While Escombe manufactured more violence in the shape of an invasion of Holland, Bulmer decided that those posters would be a mistake. They'd create panic. At last he went away,

and when, a few days later, the consequence of the crisis proved merely to be a new comb-out and the raising of the military age to fifty-one, Bulmer thought: "I'm glad I went to see Escombe that morning. He's excessive, that chap, sometimes. It's a good thing I pulled him round. Nobody knows what he'd have done if I hadn't calmed him down." He felt very powerful. He was shaping the Empire.

As for Escombe, he said to his secretary: "Narrow shave that, narrow shave. If Bulmer hadn't come to see me that morning, he'd have got himself into such a panic that I couldn't have panicked harder than he. And then how should I have brought off his reaction?"

CHAPTER XII

HULLO, LIFE!

BULMER thought: "It's over. For a time. Guess it'll break out again by and by. The Allies are bound to quarrel. Natural, after all." His mind fastened on the complexities of the peace just made, on the extraordinary confusion in Europe. There it was, the peace. No fine sense of justice, no intuition, even warned him that peace was sowing the seeds of war by enthralling Germans under Italians, Poles, Czecho-Slovaks; he saw no injustice in the forcible disruption of enemy states; he had learnt no lesson even from modern history. "The Daily Gazette" in 1912 thundered that Serbia must have a port. "The Daily Gazette" in 1919 saw no reason why Austria should have a port. "The Daily Gazette" in 1913 clamoured that the Rumanians must unite with their brothers in the Dobrudja, then enslaved by the Bulgar. "The Daily Gazette" in 1919 saw no reason why Germans should not be kept separate from their compatriots in East Prussia, enslaved under the Poles. So his conclusion was neither philosophic nor founded on historic experience. He thought that the war would break out again, because war always broke out. Like small-pox. Yes, like small-pox: we'd got vaccination, and yet it broke out occasionally. And then everybody ran to the doctors to be vaccinated again. No doubt they'd all run to the League of Nations for an injunction of anti-war serum. But small-pox broke out all the same. So would war.

He thought: "Of course, there's Labour. Labour doesn't want war. At least, it thinks it doesn't. Everybody thinks they don't want war, and everybody does the things which bring it about. Labour'd be just

the same. Even if they set up their precious Guild Socialism, I suspect the international ironworkers would make war on the international bakers to get bread from them under the most favoured trade-union clause." And he played with one of his few Utopian ideas. He imagined the last days of the world, when the temperature would have fallen and fallen, when the earth was almost as cold as the moon; when there were no insects; when the fish would lie frozen in the ice; when the birds would be dead as vegetable life vanished, and there were no seeds; when only strange animals, such as the polar bear and the blue fox, were maintaining their last generations by eating one another, and when only men would survive by their ingenuity and their obstinate will to live. He glimpsed the last war, the last battalions of men, muffled in furs, each man carrying upon his breast a little electric stove that maintained his life. They would advance in the tunnels which they made under the snow with a service shaft-cutter. There would be a great, silent white war between men who had discarded the futile rifle and the outworn fifteen-inch gun, men armoured with metals refractory to Ray 22, who would draw air through a neutralizing reservoir, thus able to resist the poisoned gas that spread all over the earth from bombs dropped out of aeroplanes. The aeroplanes would not dare to approach the acrid fumes with which mankind surrounded itself nearer than six or seven thousand yards. And men would die, and die, and the snow would fall upon their tunnels and obliterate them. A Jones would invent a mask that no poison could penetrate, a Dupont a gas that no mask could stop. Jones would be knighted, and Dupont would get the Légion d'Honneur. And Ray 22 would be superseded as out of date. Buried in the warm bowels of the earth, men would kill by thought wave.

He laughed. Or perhaps the world would be struck by a comet that now lay a million years away in another nebular system. Then the air would be filled with flame, the volcanoes would belch molten lava, and the sizzling earth would vomit pungent smoke. Among the flames and the clouds men would still be fighting, encased in a new kind of asbestos armour, and swirl away, locked in hate, struggling, scorched figures, down

into the chaldrons of hell, and so disappear, charred, carbonized figures, their fingers at one another's throats. . . .

War, always war. They would fight for the last drop of water. And it was right. The last drop of water to the greediest gullet. Labour? Yes, there was Labour. He supposed he mustn't think about those things. He was a Labour man. Reflectively, Bulmer wondered why he hadn't gone Labour months before. He hadn't been able to resist it, in the end: Labour was so very much the latest thing. It was fashionable; a whole lot of smart people, a couple of earls, and three peeresses, had taken it up. But he realized that it wasn't quite that. He had begun on an impulse, when "The Daily Mail," during the election, gave a column a day to the Labour Party. He realized that this couldn't go on, that "The Daily Mail" was fundamentally a middle-class paper. So was "The Daily Gazette," but he saw that, as wages rose, and they were rising, a new class of newspaper buyers was going to demand news. There was no Labour daily. He saw that the middle-class could not give him a circulation of more than a million a day, while there were four million trade-unionists. He hesitated a little on account of "The Day." "The Day" was no longer the paper of generations of Mortimers; it was a nippy, up-to-date "Day," with leaderettes and summaries of news, and dramatic accounts of parliamentary proceedings. It was no longer "The Yesterday," but it was not "To-morrow." So Bulmer determined, as he put it, to let "The Day" stew in its own cocoa. As for "The Daily Gazette," he printed a poster:

"SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN:
WATCH 'THE DAILY GAZETTE.'"

He did not tell even Alford what this meant. The editor, as well as his staff, were, for three days, pursued by questions from the "Cock," the Press Club, and other Fleet Street rumour exchanges. They did not know.

"How's one to know what the boss is thinking?" said Renton, the foreign editor. "It's something new. So how is one to forecast?"

On the 5th of December all "The Daily Gazettes" advertised under large headlines that the group had gone Labour. London would have been enormously excited if the cocaine case had not occupied it. Bulmer missed this fact, but it was too late to get the Attorney-General to postpone proceedings for a week, so he did not quite make his effect. People said: "At it again! Same old weathercock." And several rivals in Fleet Street, who had never intended to go Labour themselves, were annoyed because Bulmer had done so: he had done what they could have done if they'd wanted to, and he'd wanted to do the thing which perhaps they should have done. His conversion half-proved that Labour was in the right.

"Anyhow," said the editor of "The Courier," "if it isn't the right thing, it'll become the right thing now that blighter's done it." The editor of "The Courier" was not quite right, for Bulmer was in a rather false position. He found that he had quarrelled with Escombe, because Escombe, after a long conference with his secretary, decided that, the war being done, this was the moment when Bulmer would hang himself. "I think he's done it," he said. "I think he's made his first mistake. If his papers were suitable for labour men, labour men would have bought them long ago. Now he's trying to seduce them by adopting their politics. No good. There are no labour politics. There are only desires for more wages, more beer, and less work. The middle-class is different. It *has* got politics, which are summed up in keeping Labour down. So Bulmer can preach Socialism and water; it won't sell him an extra copy, and by ceasing to urge me to shoot strikers he'll lose three or four hundred thousand supporters."

Escombe was right, for Bulmer found little support in the Labour ranks. The honest leaders suspected him. They were willing to use him, but not to trust him; they felt that he had turned against his own side and that this might become a habit. One of them, an ex-schoolmaster, very extreme, who had just lost his seat, was acute enough to understand him. In an address to the party executive he said: "Bulmer's taken up Labour because it's scoring, but within six

months we'll be fighting Russia, establishing conscription, will be in the full blast of the reaction. That will be the latest, and Bulmer won't let the latest escape."

The labour leader was partly wrong, for, on this late day of June, Bulmer realized that he could not turn back. The last six months had been very difficult; the miners' strike had not been troublesome, because photographs of impossible miners' cottages made effective copy, and because it was easy to draw sympathy from the public by describing the moist atmosphere in hot mines. But the Tube strike worried him, because it immediately annoyed his readers, and anything that annoyed his readers annoyed him. And he lost himself in the confusion of labour politics, in the rivalries between the Miners' Federation and its constituent unions, among the overlapping functions of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade-Union Congress. Though he had engaged Labour experts, he found that they quarrelled abominably, that he could not trust the Socialist Labour Federation to represent correctly the British Socialist Party. As for the British Workers' League and its extraordinary compound of decayed Toryism and sham Radicalism, he could not understand it at all. Once he said to Alford: "Oh, lor', I don't say I wished we'd stayed plain Liberal, but it'd have been easier. This blasted Labour movement's full of people who believe in it, and so they backbite, and secede, and do each other down, as is the way of all honest men."

But it couldn't be helped. And in a way it was fun. It had given him a new status; it had made him truly independent, by grouping round him the hatred of the old parties and the suspicion of the new. Rustington told him that Ibsen said that the strong man is the lonely man. This comforted Bulmer a great deal. Also, he was flattered by the power which clung to him. It brought him in touch with eventful people. He even lunched with President Wilson, who disappointed him. In common with the rest of the Liberal press he had set up a picture of the President as a sort of St. George, but what he lunched with was St. George, M.A. The President listened to him, endlessly, bending upon him, through kindly glasses,

a sharp, grey gaze. He seemed a benevolent, meek person, and only the tight mouth and long, flat chin made one suspect that he had obstinate convictions. When he talked, the President seemed equally assured on idealism and on trade. He was interested in both, and did not find them clash. And he had downright ways of saying: "I don't think so. Your proposal would be repugnant to the moral sense of my country." Also he quoted Tennyson with an air of discovery. Bulmer was plotting to interview him and to annex him for Labour. He realized that Labour feared the Greeks, but in the present state of things they would hardly say: "We fear Bulmer even when he brings Wilson." Only the President seemed to know all about it, as if he had learnt in Paris that everybody, from the vegetarians to the Jugo-Slavs, wanted to get hold of him. So he refused, saying in that disconcerting, direct way: "No. If I issue a message, I shall issue it to my countrymen." He was absolutely lucid, cruelly shrewd, and entirely incorruptible. From Bulmer's point of view, about as comfortable as a hair-brush in bed.

Yet Bulmer greatly needed some reassurance, some satisfaction, if only of vanity. He was forty-nine, and his chances with Janet had not increased. Houghton had returned, released by the Turks soon after the Armistice, but delayed by fever until the previous week. Janet, the day before, told him nothing. She fenced with him, and her voice was soft. He thought that she was melting to him, did not see that she wanted to spare him. They had rather a long argument, and Bulmer bluntly pointed out to her that she was thirty-one.

"Well," she said, "one's got to be thirty-one some time. Of course I know that a woman, so long as she's marriageable, is always twenty-nine. But I'm thirty-one. It may be a mistake, but it's no crime."

He pressed her, but she would not answer. The grey eyes were very soft, and a flush lay upon her cheeks; she seemed pretty and content.

"Dick," she said, "perhaps . . ." Then she changed her mind, and a fleeting look of fear crossed her face. Abruptly she added:

"I want to see 'Hullo, Life!' Will you take me?"

"Of course I will. What about to-morrow night?

I'll get a box if I can. If not, as soon as I can get one."

"All right. I want to see 'Hullo, Life!' It's so much like our period to have a revue called like that, immediately after peace."

"Jolly up-to-date idea."

"Yes, I suppose so. I don't mean that. . . . Now that the war is over . . . and as that other song goes: 'Won't we be in clover?' it'll be 'Rule Britannia' and 'God save the King.'"

"You're getting jolly patriotic."

"Oh, I don't mean that. We sing 'God save the King' in the same way as we go to church. Just like that. Only the title, 'Hullo, Life!' it seems to mean so much more than it says. It means humanity dancing in the Park where the grass is beginning to grow green on the brown places that the soldiers made when they were drilling. It says: This is the end. No more killing. Now, we that are alive, we hail life."

"I don't see much to hail," said Bulmer. "I might . . . . if you chose."

"Don't be silly," she said, hurriedly. "Ring me up when you've got the box."

Bulmer secured the box by luck, and at a great price, from a seat speculator. "Hullo, Life!" was booked three weeks ahead. For a moment, as Janet leant over the edge of the box, surveying the enormous audience, she was thrilled. They swarmed like ants. Dark, male ants, and female ants in light colours, with white shoulders that shimmered under a crashing light. "Such a lot of them!" she whispered, with wide eyes, "still alive!"

Bulmer did not say much. Seated a little behind her, looking at the slender neck, upon which strayed the incurably untidy hair that delighted him, he was disturbed. There was something portentous in her absorption. It could not be "Hullo, Life!" this revue like all other revues, with its silly imitations of actors, its tunes drawn from the ragbag of defunct musical comedies, its incredibly idiotic young hero, and the perpetual girls in a row, all dressed alike and all shouting: "No, not reely!" The only song that held this dramatic dustheap together was "Hullo, Life!"

which appeared at the end of the second act, and was sung in her melodious, hoarse voice by Gladys Champagne. Unexpectedly, it had a new rhythm. Already it was well known, and though the audience listened silently to each couplet, they took up the first words of the chorus, and, by degrees, the voice of the singer was drowned:

"Khaki boys and boys in blue,
Have made Kaiser and Crown Prince rue
The day they challenged Britain's might
And saw the dachshund put to flight.
And now we've got strikes everywhere,
Whisky there's none and beer is rare,
Are we down-hearted? We say, No!
Hullo! Hullo! Hullo, Life! Hullo!
What's your answer? Cheerio!
Hullo! Hullo! Hullo, Life! Hullo!"

At each chorus the singing grew louder. It was silly and splendid. All these people, small people, light people, people in pain, people free at last, people full of hope, and people bereft, poured their emotion into these poor words, as well as they could saluted returning life. As the curtain went down to applause that would not stop, the last words of the chorus mixed with the decrepitation of the clapping. Janet turned towards Bulmer, her eyes bright, her mouth smiling: "Hullo! Hullo! Hullo, Life! Hullo!" she murmured. "Isn't it splendid? I'm so happy!" Bulmer put out his hand and took hers; for a moment she surrendered, clasping his fingers. Then, suddenly, a flush dyed her face and shoulders. She snatched her hand away; with a little wry smile, and eyes that seemed retracted, she said, in a hurried whisper:

"I mustn't let you do that, Dick. I . . . I'm going to marry Major Houghton next month. I . . . I'm sorry."

Bulmer did not reply, did not protest. Weariness fell on him, as if the years kept away by activity had tumbled upon his shoulders. For a moment, Atlas bent under the weight of earth. Janet said something. He did not hear her. The curtain went up again; the third act was played, and he was numb. He did not know what he thought of. His pain resisted the harsh

sounds. At last Janet had to take him by the elbow to make him get up, when the curtain fell.

They went down the stairs. And Bulmer was hardly conscious of loss, rather of emptiness. In the theatre the people were still singing :

" Are we down-hearted ? We say, No !
Hullo ! Hullo ! Hullo, Life ! Hullo !
What's your answer ? Cheerio !
Hullo ! Hullo ! Hullo, Life ! Hullo ! "

CHAPTER XIII

CALIBAN

PORTMAN SQUARE lay white and gaudy. The last days of July, and round the south side the frequent passage of motor-cars that shone, highly glazed, distinguished by coronet or monogram. The pale light of the London sun fell like silver, and there was a sprinkle of dust upon the wood pavement. Such large houses. So solid. With so many windows in which bloomed so many pink geraniums and marguerites below the fresh, striped blinds. For a moment Bulmer stared at the traffic of Orchard Street, that clustered black and busy about the corner of Selfridge's. For the first time he felt removed from life, as if he were dead and his ghost revisited familiar places; as if the public were foreign to him as an ant-heap disturbed by his kick. Then, without emotion, he watched the last guests come out of the church in Baker Street, and, instinctively, as if he feared solicitation, walked round the square and turned up Gloucester Place.

He did not want to talk to these people. He knew some of them. The recent scene was still fresh in his mind, but he pictured it without partisanship. He had behaved well. He had come to the wedding, answered salutations, shaken hands, and, with rather hard muscles, smiled. As some intricate marionette built in Freiburg by a clock-maker. Yet he felt guilty, for Janet had asked him to come to the reception too. No, he couldn't do that. They had talked a great deal in the previous month, and, after a violent scene in which he strove to impose his personality upon her

emotions, he suddenly grew resigned. Like a woman who sees her hair grow grey, tries to dye it, by degrees realizes that the hair looks dyed, and lets it go. He was not reconciled, but he was acquiescent. And now, walking up Gloucester Place, his appearance formed an incredible contrast with his thoughts. Rather short, active-looking, with bright eyes and an intelligent, mobile mouth, he seemed under his excellent silk hat, in his excellent morning coat, with his excellently fitting trousers that just touched his white spats, a healthy, middle-aged man, master of himself and of part of the world. But he walked in a mist all the way up Gloucester Place. At the corner he hesitated: it would take him to Bickenhall Mansions, and, for a moment, overcome by sentimentality, he thought he would go and look again at the place where once he had been so happy. But he told himself: "I want air," and went on towards Regent's Park. But as he stood by the pond, where the waterfowl rested, fought and clucked, he still felt guilty and injured: he ought to have gone to the reception. Ought to have done the job completely and properly. But he knew he could not have borne it. It had been bad enough seeing the backs of those two as they knelt at the altar, understanding what the attitude meant, seeing this shape in the black coat by the side of the bending neck, tidy that day, who had taken his woman. Yes, that had been bad enough. But to go to the unaccustomed house of some relatives of hers, to stand in a crowd where everybody talked very loud, and jostled, and seemed indecently excited by the advertisement of sex . . . no, he couldn't do that. And he couldn't see them standing side by side, look her in the eyes, for she would be flushed and smiling; the man too, pleased and self-conscious; and both of them with that awful air of relief that comes over the wedded when at last the ceremony has been performed and responsibility ends. No, he couldn't go up to him, shake hands, and smile vapidly.

For a moment he thought of Houghton. It hurt him to feel no hatred. He had met him again, and one could not hate Houghton; his humorous mouth and his faintly bitter speech, his suggestion of reserve, of

withdrawn personality, made him popular. One liked Houghton. One didn't know why.

Bulmer thought: "After all, what does it matter whether I hate Houghton or not? What does it matter if I hate Janet or not? She's talked nonsense about always being my friend. Friendship!" He laughed. Friendship after love, what a black draught to drain after the rosy wine of emotion! "Well," he thought, "it's done. No more to be said," and turned. He felt very tired; he wanted to go home to lie down. The heat was very heavy and exhausted him. But, as he entered Mayfair, a disgust came over him of his big house, his vast lounge, the drawing-room, the big bathroom and its excess of comforts, the bath like the showroom at Shanks's. He thought: "I'd better go to the club. A game of bridge, perhaps." But he did not go to the club. As he went eastwards, he thought of sending for his car and for a while hiding at Bargo Court. The country? For a moment he aspired to the Shakespeare garden behind the east wing, to the great hollyhocks massed with pink cockades. But even as he remembered the old lavender bush with a stem as thick as his own wrist, as the rolling lawns, short and velvety, sent up to him a reminiscent, moist, earthy smell, he still made for the East. He went on through the Strand and along Fleet Street, like some wounded beast that makes for its natural den.

He felt better in his private office. Moss had tact enough not to remark upon his abstracted mask. As the door closed, Moss quietly disconnected the switch to the Boss's telephone. He stared at the Boss's door: he had been Bulmer's secretary for eighteen years, had grown up as the Boss grew middle-aged, and seen him triumphant, angry, ebullient, cordial, frank, and sly. Moss had been with him when he was sick; he knew all that Bulmer might have told him of Janet, of Houghton, of all the women who had helped Bulmer to waste a few weeks of his life. He knew the Boss in every way, knew the look in his eyes when he was pleased, knew a day or so ahead when a fit of temper was coming; he knew how to stir him to action, and how to restrain him. Bulmer unconsciously was his, for Moss was the perfect secretary. He had given

himself to Bulmer as he had never given himself to the good-tempered, dark wife with whom he lived happily in Hampstead. And, as he stared at the closed door, an almost uncontrollable desire came over Moss to rush in and put his arms round the Boss's shoulders, to pet him and comfort him, as he did to his own small children when they fell and cut their knees.

"It's a shame," he said aloud, as a flush rose in his dark cheeks. His soft eyes filled with rage because the big, simple, obvious, generous creature that he loved was refused something by life. He thought: "There's nothing to be done. Nothing. One can't do anything that he wouldn't think was an impertinence. Very likely he'd like to die there, like the old elephants in the jungle. The only thing to be done is to go on, plod along with new stunts, cheer him up, and keep him going until some one else proves strong enough to capture him. She'll take some finding. But he's young yet. Forty-nine. There's life in him yet, and life's worth something." He smiled, and hummed the chorus that ran through every brain:

> "Hullo! Hullo! Hullo, Life! Hullo!
> What's your answer? Cheerio!
> Hullo! Hullo! Hullo, Life! Hullo!"

Bulmer looked up from his desk with a startled expression. His senses, unnaturally vivid, perceived the song. His mouth took on a bitter curl: life indeed! What the hell was the good of life? "What was the good of life to Robinson Crusoe," he wondered, "until Man Friday came?" And he realized that Man Friday could not come to him. He'd put all his money on an idea and it had blown away. Yes, of course, there were other things. He had wealth. He had power. And in such times power was good, for the world was in chaos. For a moment he thought of the incredible situation which was spreading over the earth, of Germans held down by the Allies, ready to leap up, jealous, ambitious, bringing about in the gang of Nations the disorder that must arise when swag has to be shared and thieves fall out. To split the League of Nations, the complicated machine, into whose works every financier, every diplomat, and, if he had anything to do with it, every

journalist would throw a handful of sand as he passed by. He saw the Poles grinding the Jews, the Czecho-Slovaks preparing to fight the Magyar, the Bolsheviks of Russia and Hungary spreading their doctrine as a stain of oil into Rumania and beyond. He saw Britain bubbling with rage and unrest. On that day the miners of West Yorkshire were out, not only against the masters and the State, but against their own Federation; the bakers, perhaps, were coming out; the police were striking in various parts. The air was full of strikes impending, strikes in progress, strikes settled. Settled? As well settle those as a wound by a bit of sticking-plaster that comes off. He suddenly developed enough imagination to perceive an incredible future, to understand that rising wages meant rising prices, that profits and the spending thereof on the sterile labour of goldsmiths, on motor-cars, on footmen, would go on all the same. He realized the vicious circle, rising wages and rising prices, and nobody any better off . . . only goaded by envy, exasperated by injustice. Like a bull at bay and frothing at the mouth, Labour would turn on society and destroy the present order, suppress wages, suppress profits, reduce living to a decent level of barbarism where the baker would barter his loaves for a length of cloth and once more men would bear arms.

Revolution! the word tempted him. His personal anguish was so sharp that he desired the end of a society in which this anguish lived. Then he thought: "After all, what's it got to do with me? Society and all that? I am what I am; I'm alone, like most people. After my death, Hettie and Ellie will appoint Alford to carry on. And Alford will give me a three col. obituary. One slips into life easily enough, and one slips out. One's not missed. One's not missed because one doesn't hitch on to other people."

He got up and went to the window. At two points of Ludgate Circus he saw small boys carrying the yellow placards of "The Evening Gazette." He raised the sash higher and leaned out. Through the rumble of London he faintly heard the voice of the nearer boy:

"G'zette! Speshul G'zette."

He stared at him. To-day's "Gazette." There

would be to-morrow's "Gazette," and so on for ever. The other thought was still on him; he said, aloud:

"One doesn't hitch on to anybody. One just messes about a bit in the middle of life, and life sails away."

"G'zette," came the voice again, "Speshul G'zette."

THE END

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